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Arguing with annihilationism

a doctrinal assessment with special reference to recent evangelical debate

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ARGUING WITH ANNIHILATIONISM:
A DOCTRINAL ASSESSMENT WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RECENT
EVANGELICAL DEBATE

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PH.D.

2000

Arguing With Annihilationism:

**a doctrinal assessment
with special reference to recent evangelical debate**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the University of Coventry's requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Andrew Saville

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Abstract

This thesis offers a doctrinal assessment of Annihilationism (also known as Conditionalism), which is that view of hell which holds that there is a hell, but that it has an end in the extinction of the damned. In my first chapter I make a survey of the importance, history and terminology of the debate. Until recently most Evangelicals held that the damned were tormented in hell without end. I have termed this position Traditionalism, since it is the mainstream position of the Western theological tradition. However, over the last 25 years Annihilationism has been advanced by a number of evangelical theologians. In my second and third chapters I examine the two principal doctrinal objections Annihilationism raises about the traditional doctrine of hell as unending torment: the issue of justice (how can an unending punishment be just? And the related issue of how can God be loving if he inflicts unending torment?), and the issue of dualism (how can the unending existence of the evil in hell be reconciled with future perfection? And the related issue of how can the existence of hell not spoil heaven?). I begin with an exposition of each objection in the recent literature of the last 25 years, but I also draw on the debate from the previous period when it was widely debated, in the second half of the nineteenth century. I argue that annihilationists' doctrinal arguments are not conclusive, and at certain points are to be rejected. However, I also argue that annihilationists may be correct to argue that the punishment posited by a traditionalist hell is excessively severe. I present the notion of the fixity of the damned as a possible mitigation. I also argue that annihilationists are correct to argue that Traditionalism is excessively dualistic. I present a modified Traditionalism to respond to this point, which I call Reconciliationism, in which the damned cease to sin, are lucid, and are reconciled to God, while remaining in hell. My exposition of Reconciliationism draws particularly on the work of Henri Blocher, with additional exposition of the position's advocates, such as T.R. Birks and James Langton Clarke, from the latter half of the nineteenth which was the only period in history when this position was widely discussed. A fourth chapter explores the relationship between the experience of Christ on the cross and the damned in hell. As well as expounding the arguments in the debate about hell, I also examine the link between the cross and hell in Luther, Calvin, Owen, Edwards and Packer. I argue that, on the basis of this link

established by the doctrine of penal substitution, annihilationists are forced to draw unorthodox conclusions about the incarnation and the resurrection.

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Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Debate About Annihilationism

This thesis aims to offer a doctrinal assessment of the annihilationist doctrine of hell. In brief, Annihilationism, as I intend to define it in this thesis, is that view of hell which holds that there is a hell, but that it has an end in the extinction of the damned. This definition thus excludes a large number of theologians who hold that the extinction of the damned occurs at the death of the body. It stands in distinction both to Universalism and also to Traditionalism which I intend to define as any view of hell which holds that the existence of the damned is unending. Annihilationism is thus not an alternative to hell, but a particular belief about hell. For the present I would note that in the recent debate Annihilationism is usually synonymous with the doctrine of Conditional Immortality, or Conditionalism as it is sometimes known. A typical definition is given by John Wenham: "Conditionals... look for the resurrection of all men, followed by the just sentence according to the deserts of each, which will mean anguish (but not unending torment) for those outside Christ, finally terminating in the second death."¹ I will examine the definition and usage of these terms more fully below.

In outline, I will assess the doctrinal arguments used for and against Annihilationism as well as the underlying logic of the position. I will focus on the debate about Annihilationism in recent evangelical writing in English from the last twenty-five years, since this is the provenance of most of the recent debate, although I will occasionally range more widely where this serves to clarify or extend the assessment. I will aim to demonstrate that the doctrine of Annihilationism entails the denial of other doctrines usually held as orthodox by evangelicals and thus conclude that Annihilationism is not a valid option for someone wishing to work within an evangelical framework. However, I will also argue that some of the annihilationist criticisms of Traditionalism are valid. Therefore I will seek to formulate some modifications of Traditionalism which better respond to these criticisms. While the demonstration of a modified doctrine of hell which better answers annihilationist criticisms is not formally necessary to reject Annihilationism, I will argue it greatly strengthens the case. This modified Traditionalism I will term Reconciliationism and I will draw particularly on the work of the French

¹ J.W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1974), pp. 34-35.

theologian Henri Blocher and the nineteenth century English theologian T.R. Birks. Before proceeding further I will attempt a brief justification for study of the topic and my terms of reference.

1.1 A Justification of the Terms of Reference

1.1.1 Why Study Hell?

In the current theological world I may need to offer some justification for studying hell. In the 'Introduction' to his book, *The Problem of Hell*, Jonathan Kvanvig reviews the history of the study of hell: "The lesson here is clear: The theological trend of the last few centuries strays dramatically from a central feature of historical Christianity."² As evidence he notes,

Even the popular press has taken notice of the phenomenon: "Meantime," observes church historian Martin Marty, "Hell disappeared. And no one noticed."... When he prepared a Harvard lecture on the disappearance of hell, Marty consulted the indices of several scholarly journals, including one dating back to 1889, and failed to find a single entry.³

However, the situation has changed markedly and David Moore notes, writing in 1995, "The recent debate on hell, however, has caused an astronomical upswing of magazine and journal articles on the topic in the last five years, which has truly been amazing."⁴

Kvanvig also comments on the importance of study of the doctrine:

the problem of hell cannot be ignored. Contrary to the claim of an earlier quote, that "hell is theology's H-word, a subject too trite for serious scholarship," there is good reason, even overwhelming reason, for a careful and scholarly consideration of the doctrine of hell,...⁵

There are many reasons for such a consideration of hell, but I will briefly comment on just one: the issue of theodicy. Kvanvig rightly states that "... the problem of hell [is] the worst

² J.L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: OUP, 1993), p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, p.13, quoting Kenneth L. Woodward, "Heaven," *Newsweek*, March 29, 1989, p. 54, quoting from Martin E. Marty, "Hell Disappeared. No One Noticed. A Civic Argument," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (July-October 1985), p. 393. The Journal referred to is *Church History*, the official publication of the American Society of Church History.

⁴ David George Moore, *The Battle For Hell: A Survey and Evaluation of Evangelicals' Growing Attraction to the Doctrine of Annihilationism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), p. 16, n. 80.

⁵ Kvanvig, *op. cit.*, p. 22, quoting Woodward, *op. cit.*

instance of the problem of evil..."⁶ Indeed "The problem of hell differs from the general problem of evil... the problem of hell arises precisely because the point of hell brings about evil that seems in no way capable of being redressed by further good, at any rate, not *future* good."⁷ This problem has long been an objection to the traditional doctrine. John Hick's fifth of five objections to the doctrine of eternal torment follows from the accusation that "hell, understood as Augustine... understood it, must be accounted a major part of the problem of evil," or even "the largest part" of it.⁸ From an evangelical perspective, Clark Pinnock says that, "the idea of everlasting torment (especially if it is linked to soteriological predestination) raises the problem of evil to impossible dimensions. If Christians want to hold that God created some people to be tortured in hell forever, then the apologetic task in relation to theodicy is just hopeless."⁹ Larry Dixon concludes: "One of the driving forces behind the evangelical exodus from the traditional doctrine of hell is that of setting forth a biblical and reasonable theodicy to the world."¹⁰

Jerry Walls argues that the doctrine of hell poses a crucial dilemma for the church at the end of the twentieth century.

On the one hand, the person who believes in Christ and accepts the authority of his teaching seems inextricably committed to believing the doctrine of eternal hell... But on the other hand, if one accepts the doctrine, he seems to be committed to a morally offensive notion.

I believe Christians must squarely face this dilemma. If the doctrine is indeed morally bankrupt, it should frankly and forthrightly be discarded. But if it is not, it should be reclaimed and faithfully taught. Either way, it involves claims of such immense importance that it cannot be ignored.¹¹

My aim in studying this debate is to seek to offer a doctrinal assessment of Annihilationism as a contribution to the end that the doctrine of hell can be "reclaimed and faithfully taught."

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4. There is a discussion of recent writing on this issue in the philosophy of religion in van Holton, Wilko, 'Eschatology with a Vengeance: Hell as the Greatest Conceivable Evil', in Fergusson, David & Sarot, Marcel, *The Future as God's Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸ J. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 200.

⁹ Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," *Criswell Theological Review*, 4.2 (1990): pp. 253-54.

¹⁰ L. Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News: Confronting the Contemporary Challenges to Jesus' Teaching on Hell* (Wheaton, Ill.: Bridgepoint, 1992), p. 70.

¹¹ Jerry Walls, *The Logic of Damnation: A Defence of the Traditional Doctrine of Hell* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 157.

1.1.2 Why Evangelical?

I would note three reasons why I am focusing on the evangelical debate in this thesis. First, the current debate about Annihilationism, as I have defined it, is largely an evangelical one. Second, evangelicalism is a large, significant and growing form of Christianity. Third, evangelicalism is perhaps the chief heir of the traditionalist doctrine of hell. Under this head I will also respond to the view that evangelical theology is not usually at a high enough level of sophistication to warrant doctoral study. Having offered a brief definition of evangelicalism, I will expand each of these points in turn.

Under the heading 'A working definition of evangelicalism', Alister McGrath writes:

The debate over the nature of evangelical identity is likely to remain a subject of debate and discussion as evangelicalism continues to develop and expand. In part this reflects the complex historical origins of the movement,... Nevertheless, most evangelicals and well-informed observers of the movement would suggest that evangelicalism is essentially colligatory, in that it finds its identity in relation to a series of central interacting themes and concerns, including the following:

1. A focus, both devotionally and theologically, on the person of Jesus Christ, especially his death on the cross;
2. The identification of Scripture as the ultimate authority in matters of spirituality, doctrine and ethics;
3. An emphasis upon conversion or a 'new birth' as a life-changing religious experience;
4. A concern for sharing the faith, especially through evangelism.¹²

My first reason for focusing on evangelicalism is that almost all annihilationists in the recent debate are evangelicals, as are the majority of traditionalists who have interacted with Annihilationism. The ACUTE study notes that, "Derek Tidball's influential study of

¹² McGrath, Alister E., *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), p. 22. McGrath's list is very similar to that of David Bebbington, who on the basis of detailed historical research lists conversionism (a call to people to be converted), activism (an active faith affecting all of life), biblicism (A commitment to the authority and inspiration of the Bible), and crucicentrism (holding the cross at the centre of all life and theology). [Bebbington, David, W., *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 2-17].

In the recent study on hell by the Evangelical Alliance in the United Kingdom the authors note that there is an abundance of studies seeking to define evangelicalism [ACUTE, *The Nature of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), p.123, n.5]. Besides the book by McGrath already mentioned, they mention: Tidball, Derek, *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994); McGrath, Alister E., *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993); Noll, Mark A., *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Leicester: IVP, 1994); Wells, David F., *No Place for Truth, or*

past and present evangelicalism in fact defines this debate as a distinctively evangelical one, which many in the wider church and world would regard as an internal 'family' dispute."¹³ Further, in evangelicalism, Annihilationism has rapidly become the major alternative understanding of hell to Traditionalism.¹⁴ Kendall Harmon opens his article on Annihilationism with these words: "The seeds of the evangelical confusion about the final state of those who reject Christ have been widely sown in our generation."¹⁵ In summarising the present situation in evangelicalism, James Packer quotes the Anglican theologian Peter Toon:

In 1986 Peter Toon wrote, with reference mainly to Britain and North America: "In conservative circles there is a seeming reluctance to espouse publicly a doctrine of hell, and where it is held there is a seeming tendency towards a doctrine of hell as annihilation." He went on to refer to "conditional immortality, which appears to be gaining acceptance in evangelical orthodox circles."¹⁶ His words, I guess, are truer in 1990 than when they first appeared.¹⁷

Packer's judgement is confirmed by the opening words of Donald Macleod's article in *Evangelicals Now* dated June 1991: "The new orthodoxy is Annihilationism."¹⁸ However, while the recent debate is predominantly an evangelical one, I will not limit myself to evangelical writers in this thesis, but will also draw on writers from other traditions if their arguments are relevant to the debate. In particular there were a number of theologians from around the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries who argued for Annihilationism, but not all of whom would be described as 'evangelical' today.

Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology? (Leicester: IVP, 1993); Thompson, Mark, *Saving the heart: What is an Evangelical?* (London: St. Matthias Press, 1995).

¹³ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 122, quoting Tidball, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-3.

¹⁴ "The impact of this debate may be reflected in a recent theological survey of 848 Evangelical Alliance member churches, which showed conditionalism to be a minority view, but a not insignificant one." [Footnote: In the survey, conducted in summer and autumn 1998, 79.6% of responses (675 churches) affirmed the statement, 'Those who die without faith in Jesus face eternal punishment in hell', while 14.2% (121 churches) affirmed the statement, 'Those who die without faith in Jesus will be annihilated'.] [ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 6.]

¹⁵ K.S. Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of God*, ed. by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 193. [I would like to express my thanks to Rev. Harmon for giving me a pre-publication copy of his paper, which greatly helped me in my studies. I would also like to express my warm thanks to Rev. Harmon for his advice and encouragement and to acknowledge my debt to him for many insights into this complex debate.]

¹⁶ Peter Toon, *Heaven and Hell: A Biblical and Theological Overview* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986.) pp. 174, 176. In a footnote Toon writes: "This assertion is difficult to prove, but it is based on the writer's conversations over a number of years with evangelical theologians." [*Ibid.*, p. 181].

¹⁷ J.I. Packer, *The Problem of Eternal Punishment* (Cheshire: Orthos, n.d.), p. 12.

¹⁸ D. Macleod, "Must we all become Annihilationists?" in *Evangelicals Now* (June 1991), p. 13. He is clearly referring to a new orthodoxy amongst evangelicals.

It might seem that John Hick assumes a broader theological support for Annihilationism when he states that some form of it is also the major alternative to Universalism: "... contemporary theologians who do not accept the doctrine of universal salvation usually speak of the finally lost as passing out of existence rather than as endlessly enduring the torments of hell-fire."¹⁹ However, Hick's definition of Annihilationism includes the position I am excluding, that the damned pass out of existence at death, and thus his conclusion has limited relevance to this discussion.

A second reason for focusing on evangelicalism is its importance in the world-wide church. Evangelicalism, as I have defined it, is a very numerous and widespread phenomenon indeed, including most of Pentecostalism, Fundamentalism, and many in 'mainline' denominations (for example, perhaps a third of the Church of England could be labelled 'evangelical'). Thus it is a very extensive movement indeed, and any theological doctrine that influences evangelicalism is necessarily an influential doctrine. The importance of evangelicalism is highlighted by Alister McGrath: "It is widely agreed that evangelicalism is one of the most significant forms of Christianity in the modern world, having particular influence in North America."²⁰ Kendall Harmon draws the following conclusion: "When mainstream evangelical theologians... disagree on an important doctrine like hell, clearly a re-examination is in order."²¹

Third, evangelicalism stands in the mainstream Western theological tradition in its doctrine of hell.²² It is this Traditionalism which is now being challenged. Therefore to study and engage in this debate amongst evangelicals is actually to engage in debate with this mainstream tradition. This long tradition of which Traditionalism is heir gives the recent debate a well developed doctrinal context. However, while there are some books and articles by academic theologians aimed at an academic audience, much of the writing

¹⁹ Hick, *Death*, p. 201.

²⁰ A.E. McGrath, *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 129. Again, "It is now clear that evangelicalism is the largest and most actively committed form of Christianity in the West." McGrath, *Passion*, p. 9

²¹ Harmon, *Case*, p. 195.

²² Harmon highlights one reason for referring to the 'Western' tradition when he observes, "Hell has been a much greater problem in Western than Eastern thought in part because Western soteriology has had a strongly juridical character, whereas in Eastern thought this has been less so." [K.S. Harmon, *Finally Excluded From God? Some Twentieth Century Theological Explorations of the Problem of Hell and Universalism with Reference to the Historical Development of These Doctrines*. DPhil diss. (Oxford University, 1993), p. 22.

by evangelicals on the doctrine of hell has been either by academics but aimed at a non-academic audience, or has been written by popular, rather than academic, authors. This is an indication of the popular concern and interest there is in this question in the evangelical constituency, and thus its importance to the church. However, whatever the lack of academic rigour in much that has been written in this debate, my concern in this thesis is with the actual doctrine of Annihilationism, and thus I hope that whatever the level of the writing being engaged with, my own arguments can still be rigorous.

1.1.3 Why Annihilationism?

I would also note three reasons for the study of Annihilationism. First, there is the widespread recognition amongst evangelicals of a need for further study of Annihilationism. Second, there is the widespread recognition that there are important theological, pastoral and evangelistic implications following from the doctrine of hell one holds. Third, if, as I will argue, Annihilationism arises out of a dissatisfaction of Traditionalism, then a study of Annihilationism may serve to highlight weaknesses in Traditionalism to which it is reacting. I will argue that it does just this, and thus it serves to point out areas where a reformulation of Traditionalism is necessary. I will now briefly expand on these three reasons.

First, as well as a recognition of the growing influence of Annihilationism, noted above, there is also a widespread recognition amongst evangelicals that there is a need for further study of the doctrine of hell, including a more rigorous study of the annihilationist arguments and the traditionalist position it rejects. Eryl Davies' assessment from 1991 was "that very little has been written in the last three or four decades clarifying and upholding the orthodox doctrine [of hell] and at the same time interacting with the flood of conditionalist/annihilationist writings in recent years."²³ John Wenham concluded his chapter on 'Hell', in his 1974 book *The Goodness of God*, with a section entitled 'The Need for Fresh Study'. He comments:

A study of the literature reveals a remarkable failure by the 'traditional orthodox' to get to grips with the solid arguments put up by conditionalists. This is partly due to a vicious circle, in which suspicion of heresy has made it difficult for

²³ Eryl Davies, *An Angry God? The Biblical Doctrine of Wrath, Final Judgement and Hell* (Bryntirion: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1992), p. 17.

conditionalists to find reputable publishers, which has resulted in their books being unread, which in its turn has resulted in their views remaining unduly suspect... Discussion there must be if Christians are to be renewed in a common mind for the faithful proclamation of the gospel.²⁴

In a paper delivered 17 years later he expresses great disappointment at the quality of those 'traditional orthodox' books that have been published since then. Commenting on Shedd, Helm, Gerstner and Packer he writes: "The extraordinary thing about these replies is that none of them actually addresses the arguments used by the conditionalist."²⁵ His 1991 paper ends with this call: "Most of all I should rejoice to see a number of theologians (including some of the very first water) joining Fudge in researching this great topic in all its ramifications."²⁶ This call he repeats unchanged in his Autobiography, published in 1998, although written before his death in 1996. Edward Fudge, a leading annihilationist, echoes Wenham's earlier statement when he writes in his *Preface*: "The conditionalist arguments have never been squarely met,... this subject has not been discussed in the open by the best minds and methods of mainstream evangelical scholarship."²⁷ Stephen Travis wrote in 1980: "There is here an important issue for debate, a debate in which for half a century scholars have hardly engaged at all."²⁸ I would argue that this lack of study is a particular problem at the doctrinal level. Thus I hope to make a contribution to this call for a re-examination in this thesis, with the focus on doctrinal arguments.

Second, there is also a widespread recognition that there are important theological, pastoral and evangelistic implications which follow from the doctrine of hell one holds. Indeed the importance of these implications explain much of the spread and vigour of the debate about hell amongst evangelicals. I have already touched on the issue of theodicy above that is raised by one's doctrine of hell. I will add some comments on the perceived pastoral and evangelistic implications. John Wenham expresses his view of the pastoral and evangelistic implications forcibly when he writes: "I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the

²⁴ Wenham, *Goodness*, pp. 40-41.

²⁵ J.W. Wenham, "The Case for Conditional Immortality," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of God*, ed. by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 167. I would like to express my thanks to John Wenham for giving me a pre-publication copy of his paper, which greatly helped me in my studies. I would also like to acknowledge my debt to his book *The Goodness of God* which planted the seed of interest in the doctrine of Annihilationism.

²⁶ Wenham, *Case*, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

²⁷ E.W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of final Punishment* (Houston: Providential Press, 1982), p. xvi.

²⁸ S.H. Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man* (Leicester: IVP, 1980), p. 136.

church for many centuries and a terrible blot on her presentation of the gospel."²⁹ From the traditionalist side J.I. Packer can write:

in his preaching of the gospel [the annihilationist] will miss out on telling the unconverted that their prospects without Christ are as bad as they possibly could be - for on the conditionalist view they aren't! These, surely, are sad losses. Conditionalism, logically thought through, cannot possibly but impoverish a Christian man, and limit his usefulness to the Lord. This is why I am concerned about the current trend towards conditionalism. I hope it may soon be reversed³⁰

Peterson is even more forthright, and sees an effect both on the evangelist and the one evangelised:

Annihilationism is a most serious error because it leads unrepentant sinners to underestimate their fate... I fear if Annihilationism is widely accepted by Christians, that will hinder the missionary enterprise. Many people have devoted their lives to bringing the gospel to the unsaved around the globe. Would they continue to do so if they really thought that the worst fate awaiting those who reject Jesus is final extinction? I seriously doubt it.³¹

Wenham responds to Packer's argument by arguing that, "It seems to me a complete fallacy to think that the worse you paint the picture of hell the more effective your evangelism will be."³² Wenham also suggests a stronger argument, that the severity of the traditionalist hell is such that it distorts the character of God, with the consequence that he could not preach it: "Unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice. It is a doctrine which I do not know how to preach without negating the loveliness and glory of God."³³ Wenham also suggests that the severity of the traditionalist hell is such that people will dismiss it because it is unjust: "Conditionalists regard their doctrine as providing a more effective deterrent than the traditional teaching, on the ground that the latter is incredible to those who hear and is simply not believed."³⁴ In conclusion, this debate is widely perceived of great importance amongst evangelicals.

Third, Annihilationism arises in part out of a dissatisfaction with elements of Traditionalism, and so a study of Annihilationism is also of value in reassessing Traditionalism by highlighting the weaknesses against which it is reacting. This link seems to be the main reason for evangelicalism being the major constituency for

²⁹ Wenham, *Case*, p. 190.

³⁰ Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³¹ R.A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1995.), p. 179. See also Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

³² Wenham, *Case*, p. 183.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

³⁴ Wenham, *Goodness*, p. 37, n. 7.

Annihilationism, since evangelicals are among the staunchest defenders of the Traditionalism, and Annihilationism is usually held as a mitigation of Traditionalism. Thus Kvanvig notes that "... the annihilation view... has been perceived over the last few centuries as a mitigation of the strong view of hell."³⁵ This is also suggested by Rowell, commenting on the debate in the nineteenth century: "The adherents of systematic conditionalism were almost entirely to be found within the Augustinian-Calvinist tradition, and placed a high value on the verbal inspiration of the Bible." He goes on to suggest that other sections of the church had alternative responses to Traditionalism:

There seems to have been no High Anglican conditionalists. The reason for this is probably to be found in the fact that they already had their own ways of modifying the rigours of eternal punishment, through the advocacy of some form of purgatory. Likewise Broad Churchmen moved towards universalism, rather than towards the elaborate theories of conditionalism.³⁶

Powys draws a similar conclusion with a formal hypothesis: "It is that **the great majority of modern positions of the unrighteous may be classified and largely explicated in terms of presuppositionally-determined reactions against 'traditional orthodoxy'**".³⁷ Thus I would agree that Annihilationism first really gained popularity in conservative theological circles in the nineteenth century because its role was to mitigate the traditional view.³⁸

This reactive quality of Annihilationism also helps explain one of the distinctive features of the literature: the majority of the arguments used by annihilationists are stated negatively, as an argument *against* Traditionalism, rather than positively as an argument *for* Annihilationism.³⁹ The reason for this is probably that Annihilationism is usually

³⁵ Kvanvig, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

³⁶ G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 205.

³⁷ D.J. Powys, 'Hell': *A Hard Look at a Hard Question. The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), p. 39 [Bold original].

³⁸ Harmon quotes and comments: "The great appeal of [Annihilationism], in the words of H.R. Mackintosh, is its attempt to function "as a via media between universalism and the ecclesiastical doctrine of eternal punishment." On this view the awfulness of sin and the vital significance of human responsibility are affirmed, and yet a way is proposed of avoiding a final, eschatological dualism since those who finally refuse to have God are sent by him into the non-existence out of which they originally came." [Harmon, *Finally Excluded*, p. 267, quoting H.R. Mackintosh, *Immortality And The Future* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), p. 212.]

³⁹ Powys notes a feature of Froome's huge work which reflects this tendency: "His work suffers from lack of clarity at points. In his enthusiasm to demonstrate the degree of historical support for conditionalism, he sometimes claims the support of people who, while opposed to everlasting torment were by no means inclined towards conditional immortality. F.W. Farrar is a case in point... A second example [is]... J.A.T.

understood by evangelicals to be an alternative to Traditionalism and mitigation of it, and thus a refutation of Traditionalism is seen as a significant part of the case *for* Annihilationism. This reactive quality of Annihilationism explains two features of this thesis. First, this reactive quality explains why I will be examining the annihilationist criticisms of Traditionalism, as well as direct statements about Annihilationism, in order to gain an understanding of Annihilationism. Second, this quality explains why I will develop modifications of Traditionalism which respond to annihilationist criticisms, and thus may go some significant way to countering Annihilationism itself. Finally, another consequence of this reactive quality of Annihilationism in the literature is that it leads to a focus in the discussion on differences with Traditionalism, such as eventual extinction, with the consequence that significant features of the annihilationist position itself, such as the relation between torment and extinction, have tended to be overlooked.

Thus the value of a study of Annihilationism lies not just in its growing importance as a theological option in its own right, but also in its links to Traditionalism. Therefore my hope is to show that while Annihilationism has significant doctrinal weaknesses that have rarely been examined in depth, it has nonetheless pointed out important weaknesses in the traditional position and, in forcing a reassessment, will leave the traditional position more securely founded. A.H. Strong rightly observes that "In our treatment of the subject of eternal punishment we must remember that false doctrine is often a reaction from the unscriptural and repulsive over-statements of Christian apologists."⁴⁰ Henri Blocher, with whose article this thesis shares several of its conclusions, shares my conclusion: "It is possible, we suggest, to reach such a renewed understanding of the old dogma that will relieve some of the tension [about the doctrine of hell]."⁴¹

1.1.4 Why Doctrinal?

I will note three main reasons for making a doctrinal study of Annihilationism. First, having argued in the previous section that there had been a lack of study of

Robinson." [D.J. Powys, "The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates about Hell and Universalism." In N.M. de S. Cameron ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 105, n. 16.]

⁴⁰ A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Rev. ed., London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), p. 1035.

⁴¹ Henri Blocher, "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil." In N.M. de S. Cameron ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 285.

Annihilationism, I want to argue here that this is particularly true at the doctrinal level. Second, I want to argue that a doctrinal study is particularly fruitful in assessing Annihilationism. Not only do annihilationists make doctrinal claims which need assessing, but there are important doctrinal implications which have not been widely noted. I believe that some of these doctrinal implications argue decisively against Annihilationism as an option for evangelicals. However, third, I also want to argue that the case against Annihilationism is strengthened if some of the elements of Traditionalism which annihilationists object to are modified. I will comment on each of these points in turn.

First, there has been a particular lack of study of Annihilationism at the doctrinal level. Exegetical study of the biblical material is the focus of the great majority of annihilationist works and traditionalist responses in the recent debate. Fudge, a leading annihilationist, gives a typical expression of this policy:

Our question finally is: *What does Scripture actually teach?* That is really the only question that matters. That is where the discussion of this subject should take place and all conclusions be reached. The Bible is God's Word written, and whatever it actually teaches must be the only authoritative source and measure of our faith."⁴² Again, "Our case rests on a detailed examination of many passages of Scripture... In the first place, therefore, objections ought not to be philosophical, dogmatic or pragmatic, but exegetical... We do not reject the traditionalist doctrine, therefore, on moral, philosophical, intuitive, judicial or emotional grounds, nor are we much concerned with the arguments of any who do."⁴³

Therefore, although some doctrinal arguments are made in the literature, they rarely form the focus of the studies. This was a lack also noted in the nineteenth century debate. In his Preface to *Life in Christ* Edward White, probably the most important nineteenth century annihilationist, justified his unusually wide doctrinal coverage in the following words:

No one hitherto has treated the question precisely in this coherent method: and yet conviction often comes when men can be persuaded to look round a large circle of ideas, while doubt remains so long as they consider a few of its degrees."⁴⁴

Writing later of the same earlier debate, Warfield draws a similar conclusion:

Metaphysical and ontological considerations must of necessity enter into any estimate of the theory of annihilation, although it is notorious that the present age is impatient and distrustful of abstract reasoning. Arguments based upon the supposed unity and simplicity of the soul carry less weight to-day than when the methods of philosophy were in more general use and favour. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the theory of annihilation has rapidly acquired a considerable

⁴² Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

⁴⁴ E. White, *Life in Christ* (London: Elliot Stock, 1878, 3rd ed.), p. xii (Preface to First Edition).

popularity. Owing to the temper of the age, *the philosophic difficulties have been insufficiently recognized.*⁴⁵

This lack of doctrinal studies remains a feature of the recent debate.⁴⁶ I aim to go some way to meeting this lack.

Second, I believe that there are particular benefits from a doctrinal study of Annihilationism. The ACUTE report recognises the importance of doctrinal study:

The Christian doctrine of hell is ultimately a construct of systematic theology. That is to say that it represents a programmatic synthesis of all relevant material from the canon of Old and New Testament Scripture, as developed through centuries of ecclesiastical debate and reflection. We shall explore these systematic theological dimensions of hell... realising the need for creedal and dogmatic formulations...⁴⁷

A doctrinal discussion, with its greater level of abstraction, is one means to assist in deciding between the different views of hell. I would note John Hick's observation that in the "highly speculative" field of eschatology "the only way to assess theories is by trying to spell out their meaning and implications as fully as possible."⁴⁸ I believe that a doctrinal discussion can clarify the implications of the different positions. Packer goes a step further when he states that, "the mainspring of conditionalism is not exegetical but theological."⁴⁹ Even though I think that many annihilationists would dispute this, it does serve to highlight the importance, albeit often unacknowledged, of the doctrinal level of debate.

In order to make a doctrinal assessment of Annihilationism there are several tasks to be completed. There is a need to expound the underlying logic of the annihilationist position which is rarely made clear in the debate. For example, I will examine the relation of penal torment and extinction in Annihilationism, which is an issue hardly ever addressed systematically. Further, where doctrinal arguments are made in the literature, they are usually brief, and variations in the position are rarely noted. There is therefore a need to systematically expound the arguments and then assess their internal coherence and also their coherence with other doctrines held by evangelicals. This latter task of assessing the coherence with other doctrines is important because the doctrine of hell is interlinked with

⁴⁵ B.B. Warfield, *Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* s.v. 'Annihilation', ed. by J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908-26), p. 548, col. 2. [Italics mine.]

⁴⁶ Harmon notes "[hell's] comparative neglect at the level of systematic analysis in recent study," [Harmon, *Finally Excluded*, p. 21].

⁴⁷ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p.36. The report continues that the ultimate test of doctrinal formulations needs to be Scripture: "evangelicals will judge the validity of these formulations first and foremost on their correspondence with pertinent biblical teaching." [p. 36]

⁴⁸ Hick, *Death*, p.231. Quoted by Harmon, *Finally Excluded*, p. 268.

many other doctrines, and thus any change in the doctrine of hell has implications for a range of other doctrines to which it is integrally related. Moore writes, "it needs to be remembered that hell is inextricably linked to other doctrines such as sin, judgment and the atonement."⁵⁰ Similarly, Guillebaud notes the importance of this wider doctrinal context: "It is impossible to begin to understand eternal punishment, if it is considered in isolation from the Problem of Evil and the Doctrine of the Atonement."⁵¹ More specifically, Leckie writes:

Conditionalism is formidable in this respect, that is, that it, more than any other eschatological speculation, influences the entire theology of those who adopt it, and would, if generally received, profoundly modify the whole Christian view of the world and life.⁵²

One of the great strengths of Traditionalism is that, as the mainstream doctrine of hell in the tradition, it is placed within a dogmatic framework carefully developed and tested over the centuries. Kvanvig notes that "... the history of discussion of the problem of hell within Christianity does considerable justice to the variety of abstract theoretical structures to which any approach to the problem of hell might appeal."⁵³ However Annihilationism has rarely been placed in this wider doctrinal context in the recent debate. I hope to demonstrate that Annihilationism raises doctrinal problems (what Leckie calls its "rational perplexities"⁵⁴) that are often not fully appreciated and are sometimes not even considered in much of the recent debate. I will argue that some of the annihilationist arguments are not internally coherent and that others would entail the denial of doctrines usually held orthodox by all evangelicals. I believe that some of these problems are serious enough to conclude that Annihilationism is not a valid option for someone wishing to work within an evangelical framework.

However, third, not all doctrinal difficulties are of themselves a necessary reason to reject a doctrine. An annihilationist could reasonably ask in response to the some of the

⁴⁹ J.I. Packer, *God's Words* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), p. 209.

⁵⁰ Moore, *op. cit.*, p.67.

⁵¹ H.E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton: The Phoenix Press, 1964), p.44.

⁵² J.H. Leckie, *The World To Come and Final Destiny* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2nd Ed., 1922), p.219. Leckie is writing with a certain understanding of Annihilationism in mind, and with certain presuppositions of his own as to what, for example, is entailed by a denial of the immortality of the soul which he believes conditionalists are required to make. His statement is thus something of an exaggeration, but still serves to make the point that to change the doctrine of hell has knock on effects on other doctrines.

⁵³ Kvanvig, *op. cit.*, p.11.

⁵⁴ Leckie, *op. cit.*, p.245.

problems raised whether there is any better alternative. Further, Donald Bloesch warns that the doctrine of hell may not be amenable to a fully rational solution when he writes: "Hell belongs with Satan and sin and death to that numinous aspect of the divine activity which is not for us to rationalize or moralize."⁵⁵ Therefore there may be no doctrine of hell that is free of all 'rational perplexities'. In consequence, as Dixon notes, "Pointing out the weaknesses in the three alternative positions to hell does not in itself prove the truth of the traditional eternal conscious punishment view."⁵⁶ Therefore I hope to strengthen the case against Annihilationism by suggesting a modified version of the Traditional doctrine to respond to some of the valid objections annihilationists have raised. This demonstration of a 'better' option is not formally necessary to reject Annihilationism, but I believe that it does strengthen the case. Further, as I have already mentioned, this strategy is also encouraged because Annihilationism has largely been held in reaction to Traditionalism, and so a response to Annihilationism will involve a reassessment of Traditionalism as well as a direct critique.

A final methodological note at this point is to emphasise that I will not be asking whether the positions I discuss can be justified from a study of the text of Scripture, except in the secondary sense that they accord with doctrines already widely held by evangelicals.⁵⁷ Rather my starting points are the doctrinal positions as they are stated or implied by evangelicals in the debate, regardless of the hermeneutical and exegetical issues about

⁵⁵ D.G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), Vol. 2, p. 227, quoting Kantonen, *The Christian Hope* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), p.107.

⁵⁶ Dixon, *op. cit.*, p.173. To the two commonly noted alternatives to Traditionalism of Annihilationism and Universalism, Dixon adds a third alternative in which the damned can be saved and transferred to heaven. This is sometimes known as Restorationism. (See especially Chapter Four, pp. 97ff.)

⁵⁷ Several writers have questioned whether Scriptural language about hell permits the type of doctrinal discussion that is sometimes conducted in the literature, and which is the subject of this thesis. Peter Cotterell writes, "That the doctrine of an eternal hell is there in Scripture is beyond dispute. That the imagery is just that, imagery, is similarly beyond dispute. What it is that corresponds to that imagery we simply do not know." [Peter Cotterell, *Mission and Meaninglessness* (London: SPCK, 1990), p. 74]. Bauckham and Hart make a similar point, but also add a comment about the importance of doctrinal coherence. "What is clear from the use of all the images of final condemnation is that at least they depict the unimaginable horror of rejection by God and its finality... They represent the final loss of salvation. It may be that beyond this we cannot go. The traditional doctrine of hell took the images of eternally experienced punishment literally, but was thereby obliged to take the images of final destruction less literally. Our contention that eschatological language is irreducibly imaginative suggests that we should be content to let the various images stand, not reducing one to another, though we must also avoid understanding them in a way that is inconsistent with what we know of God and God's purposes in Christ." [Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), pp. 146-7]. However, the majority of writers in the debate do not leave discussion at the point that Cotterell, Bauckham and Hart might recommend, but

Scripture they might assume or raise. However I recognise that such questions about Scripture will be ultimately decisive for evangelicals, but the task of testing the positions I study and propose against Scripture will need to be done elsewhere.⁵⁸

1.1.5 Why English-Speaking?

The debate about Annihilationism is also predominantly an English-speaking one. David Powys has carried out an extensive analysis of the debates about hell in the 19th and 20th centuries, and he underlines the primary provenance of the debate, a provenance which applies particularly to the debate about Annihilationism: "It is concerned mainly with English-speaking theologians, many of them British. This largely reflects the geography of the debate, at least in recent times."⁵⁹ There are also rare but important contributions from outside the English-speaking world, and I will be making particular reference to the French theologian Henri Blocher, although most of his relevant work has been translated into English. However the Annihilationism debate remains dominated by English-speaking theologians.

1.1.6 Why Recent?

The primary reason for focusing on recent literature, from the last 25 years, is that this is when the modern debate has been re-kindled. As I demonstrate below, the watershed in the debate is widely recognised as the publication of John Wenham's book *The Goodness of God* in 1974. Since then there has been a growing flood of literature from annihilationists and traditionalists alike. However, the extent of the modern debate has probably not yet reached that of the nineteenth century, when Annihilationism also became very influential amongst evangelicals. It is therefore something of a surprise that the modern debate rarely refers to writing from the previous century. However I will turn to

proceed to make more specific doctrinal statements. Again, whether or not these doctrinal statements are soundly based, my aim is to assess them as they stand.

⁵⁸ There are a large number of exegetical studies of the relevant texts, and many include a certain amount of hermeneutical reflection on the nature of eschatological language and the interpretation of metaphors related to the nature of hell. The most extensive evangelical discussion is in Powys, *Hard*, while a succinct overview of many of the texts and issues is offered by ACUTE, *op. cit.*. Both these books have extensive bibliographies.

⁵⁹ Powys, *Debates*, p. 93.

the nineteenth century debate and draw on it where it offers clearer or different doctrinal arguments which can add to my assessment of the issues.

1.2 The Structure

In the rest of this chapter I will begin by attempting to clarify and define the terms of the debate, which in this century has been fraught with misunderstanding particularly due to the variety of historical and current usage of the terms 'Conditionalism' and 'Annihilationism'. I will then offer an overview of the history of Annihilationism, and the development and current state of the debate.

Next, I will give a brief summary of the main doctrinal arguments as given by annihilationists. I will argue that they boil down to three main arguments, one of which I will deal with in this chapter, the second and third forming the bases of my second and third chapters respectively. So, in this chapter I will deal with one doctrinal issue which has loomed large in the debate, but which I believe is not as decisive as many writers believe, on both sides of the issue, and thus can be excluded at this stage. That issue is the immortality of the soul. The remaining two main arguments, each with subordinate points, revolve around questions of justice and dualism. In each of the subsequent chapters I will seek to expound and assess one of these arguments, as well as offering different aspects of a modified form of Traditionalism in response to each. The arguments I assess are not necessarily shared by all writers, but they give what I believe to be the important or distinctive points, and I will seek to highlight any significant alternatives. In chapter four I develop an argument which is less central in the literature, but which I believe is decisive for the debate, to do with the link between the punishment of Christ on the cross and that of the damned in hell. I will also explore this link in the light of the modified Traditionalism having expounded it in chapters two and three. I now offer a lengthier summary of this structure.

In chapter two, I will assess the issue of the justice of hell. Having stated the annihilationist argument against Traditionalism at this point, I will attempt to expound annihilationist penal theories which underlie their own position. In most cases these are neither clear nor even explicit, and I have usually had to make my own distinctions. I will

begin by setting out the annihilationist understanding of the fate of the damned, and in particular the relationship between the two elements of hell: torment and extinction. This also serves to clarify further the basic 'shape' of evangelical annihilationist theories. I will then offer a critical assessment. On the question of the nature of the punishment, I will argue that if extinction is understood simply as an 'infinite' punishment as annihilationists claim then their principal criticism of the justice of Traditionalism, that an infinite punishment for sin committed in this life is unjust, is self-refuting. Annihilationists are therefore left with the challenge of arguing that extinction is an infinite punishment and yet less unjust than the infinite punishment of the traditionalist hell of eternal torment.

However I will go on to argue that extinction is in fact only a finite punishment. This position raises further problems for annihilationists, in particular why the damned are not eventually translated to heaven rather than being extinguished and why an atonement was required. I will suggest that a possible formulation of Annihilationism which avoids these objections is that hell is a finite punishment but with permanent consequences. Thus the question of justice comes down to whether sin deserves an infinite or a finite punishment. I will suggest that there may be some validity to the classic traditionalist justification of an infinite punishment and therefore an unendingly experienced hell. In this case the annihilationist position would be unjustly lenient. However if the annihilationist hell is maintained to be an infinite punishment, as they claim, then the issue remains as to whether it is more just, because less severe, than the traditionalist hell. I will not attempt to adjudicate on this issue directly but instead I will argue that if annihilationists believe that their hell is more just because a mitigation of the traditionalist one, then a modified Traditionalism recently proposed by Henri Blocher can also be interpreted as a mitigation and thus may meet the annihilationist objection about injustice. Blocher's modified Traditionalism can be understood to have two aspects: on the one hand that the damned are in a fixed state; on the other hand that the damned do not sin, are lucid, and are reconciled to God. While both aspects can be understood to suggest a degree of mitigation of Traditionalism, I will examine the former in this chapter, saving the latter for the following chapter on dualism. I will suggest that Blocher's notion of the fixity of the damned can be interpreted to mean that the punishment of hell is either finite or infinite. Thus, depending upon whether Annihilationism is understood as a finite or an infinite punishment, this modified Traditionalism may be able to present an alternative to either.

In chapter three, I will examine the charge of dualism made against Traditionalism by annihilationists. Dualism is a slippery term in the debate, used broadly to refer to the ongoing existence of evil in the universe after the Last Judgement. However, I will distinguish three types of situation to which the charge of dualism is made: suffering dualism, in which continuing suffering is considered dualistic; sin dualism, in which continuing sin and rebellion is considered dualistic; and damnation dualism, in which any creature continuing in a state of damnation is considered dualistic. I will argue that suffering dualism is not dualistic because a just punishment is not a further evil, therefore the issue is that of the justice of the punishment of hell. I will also note that in making the charge of suffering dualism, Annihilationism is not immune from this charge itself. However, I go on to argue that sin dualism is properly dualistic, and that the annihilationist critique of Traditionalism is correct at this point, since it holds to the continuation of sin in hell.

One aspect of the issue of dualism is the problem of the so-called 'Abominable Fancy' which has been a part of traditionalist justifications of hell in the past, although rare in the current debate. The phrase refers to the rejection of the notion that the blessed gain 'pleasure' from the sight of the damned, but rather that the existence of hell will diminish the bliss of heaven. I will argue that annihilationist criticisms are self-refuting, since they serve to undermine any period of torment in hell.

The conclusion that Traditionalism is dualistic leads onto a final section in this third chapter which offers a modified Traditionalism which I believe offers a more satisfactory response to the problem of this sin dualism. As in the previous chapter, I will draw on the modified Traditionalism of Henri Blocher. I will divide the relevant part of Blocher's thesis into three elements: the damned do not sin in hell; the damned are lucid and thus acknowledge the justice of their punishment; and the damned are reconciled to God in the limited sense that they acknowledge the justice of God's judgement, and may even praise him for it. I will also argue that this modified Traditionalism better responds to the problem of salvation dualism than Annihilationism because there is a clearer purpose in the continued existence of the damned, and less of the sense of waste of extinction. Further, these three elements of the modified position are linked and, as I noted above,

they also provide a further mitigation of the usual traditionalist position, which may thus meet the objections of annihilationists both to the unjust severity of Traditionalism and also its dualism. Thus I will argue that this modified Traditionalism avoids the major charges of the annihilationists against Traditionalism, while retaining its strengths.

In chapter four I examine the links in the current debate and in the tradition between the cross and hell, and the arguments based upon those links. Traditionally a very similar logic has been applied by evangelicals to the justice of the punishment of Christ on the cross as to the punishment of the damned in hell. The basis of this link is the doctrine of penal substitution, by which Christ is held to have suffered the punishment for sin as a substitute for some or all sinful people. The arguments made on the basis of this link in the recent literature have usually been brief but I believe they can be developed to offer some decisive points. I argue that annihilationists must hold that after a period of torment the human nature of Christ was extinguished on the cross. I then argue that this leads to an unorthodox understanding of the incarnation, since the union of the two natures of Christ is broken, and an unorthodox understanding of the resurrection since Christ's human nature would need to be recreated having ceased to exist. I also argue that it is not possible for Christ to suffer extinction in a way analogous to the damned since his divine nature is not extinguished.

One way for annihilationists to avoid these conclusions would be to reject the link between hell and the cross that underlies these arguments. However I survey Calvin, Owen and Edwards, along with briefer studies of Luther and, from the recent debate, Packer, to examine this link. These writers are selected both because they address the link at some length and because of their importance for evangelicalism. The ACUTE report notes more broadly that evangelical theology

must give particular attention to the theologies of Reformation and post-Reformation Protestantism, since it is these theologies which have most distinctively shaped evangelical belief as we know it today... The birth of Protestantism in the early 1500s, the Puritan era and the Evangelical Revival are obvious reference-points here.⁶⁰

I argue that in the tradition this link between the cross and hell is held to follow from the doctrine of penal substitution. On the doctrine of penal substitution, Packer writes that it

⁶⁰ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, pp.111, 126.

is, "a belief which, by and large, is a distinguishing mark of the world-wide evangelical fraternity."⁶¹ Therefore I conclude that if Annihilationists are to offer an alternative link while retaining a doctrine of penal substitution, they will be rejecting the conclusions of theologians they would usually defer to. Clearly annihilationists have already rejected the doctrine of hell held by these writers, but to reject further elements of their teaching is to at least raise doubts for evangelicals assessing the doctrinal implications of this doctrine.

I will also include an Appendix in which I will examine in more detail the historic precedents for this modified Traditionalism.

1.3 Definitions

Before offering a brief history of Annihilationism and a survey of the current debate I will seek to clarify the terms used to describe the different positions. Some terms I can deal with briefly. I will use the term *extinction*, to refer to the final cessation of the existence of the damned. I use this term in preference to *annihilation*, which would confuse with Annihilationism understood as torment plus extinction; and to *destruction*, since traditionalists usually hold that this is a biblical term referring to the whole of the punishment of hell.⁶² I will refer the period of suffering before extinction as *torment*. My primary reason for choosing this term is that one of the most common descriptions of the hell of Traditionalism is as *eternal conscious torment*, and therefore it serves to highlight the common element between the two positions.⁶³ I will use the term *punishment* as a general category for any understanding of hell, and thus in context can include both torment and extinction, and eternal conscious torment. I will discuss in the next chapter whether extinction is a punishment, but my conclusion will be that it is, and therefore I will speak, for example, of extinction as part of the punishment of an annihilationist hell.

⁶¹ J.I. Packer, "What Did The Cross Achieve? The Logic Of Penal Substitution," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974), p.3.

⁶² Fudge comments that he uses the term extinction rather than annihilation to avoid the cavil that "Some have objected that 'annihilation' is physically impossible, that even when something is burned its smoke and ashes remain." [*op. cit.*, p. 431.] This is not a common objection, and therefore not a factor in my decision about terminology.

⁶³ Packer discusses the use of 'torment', and decides not to use it because "to the modern mind, it suggests sadism and cruelty and torture,..." [*op. cit.*, p. 8]. Instead he uses the phrase "divinely executed retributive process." [*Ibid.*, p. 8]. Although I think that Packer's decision is pastorally helpful, I won't follow it, since 'torment' is much more succinct a term and it has a long usage in the tradition.

Further, on terminology, I will use several terms to refer to those in heaven and those in hell, such as the blessed and the righteous for the former, and the damned, the unrighteous and the wicked for the latter. The variation is intended to carry no theological weight, their usage usually varying with the usage of an author being discussed.

1.3.1 Annihilationism and Conditionalism.

There are two main issues of definition I will note here to do with the terms Annihilationism and Conditionalism: first, there are differences in anthropology which historically have distinguished the two terms; second, there are two different understandings of personal eschatology associated with both terms. So, first, underlying the terminology of the debate are differences in anthropology. Kendall Harmon observes that "one has to be discerning enough to consider *both* aspects of a teacher's doctrine and not to assume, based on what a person's view is on one of these doctrinal areas, that you can deduce the other."⁶⁴ The anthropological distinction is over the natural immortality of the soul. "Conditional Immortality, strictly speaking, refers only to the view that all men and women are created mortal but that for those who respond to the gospel the gift of eternal life is given."⁶⁵ It was on account of the desire to emphasise this positive aspect of immortality as a gift to the righteous that many writers in the nineteenth century preferred to term their position "Life in Christ."⁶⁶ In contrast, Annihilationism, strictly speaking, holds that men and women are naturally immortal. As will be seen, 'natural immortality' here means not that the soul cannot be extinguished, but that the soul survives physical death. B.B. Warfield draws out the theoretical distinction clearly:

The point of distinction between [Annihilationism proper] and "conditionalism" is that these theories [of Annihilationism] with more or less consistency or heartiness recognize what is called the "natural immortality of the soul," and are not tempted therefore to think of the soul as by nature passing out of being at death (or at any time), and yet teach that the actual punishment inflicted upon or suffered by the wicked results in extinction of being... They retain their common character as theories of annihilation proper so long as they conceive the extinction of the soul as an effect wrought on it to which it succumbs, rather than as the natural exit of

⁶⁴ Harmon, *Case*, p.196. Harmon's discussion is the clearest in the literature, pp. 196-199. A more detailed taxonomy of all understandings of hell can be found in Powys' essay, *passim*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁶⁶ The term became popular with the publication of Edward White's book entitled *Life in Christ* in 1846.

the soul from a life which could be continued to it only by some operation upon it raising it to a higher than its natural potency.⁶⁷

More briefly: Annihilationism, strictly defined, holds that there is an immortal soul which has to be extinguished; Conditionalism, strictly defined, holds that the soul is mortal and only receives immortality as a gift. Thus the distinction is anthropological.

However this distinction has often been ignored, with Conditionalism and Annihilationism being used as synonyms by many writers. By the turn of the century Warfield could write irenically:

It has become usual, therefore, to speak of them all as annihilationists, or of them all as conditionalists; annihilationists because they all agree that the souls of the wicked cease to exist; conditionalists because they all agree that therefore persistence in life is conditioned on a right relation to God.⁶⁸

This overlapping usage has generally continued in the current evangelical debate, and both terms are used by proponents and opponents alike. Packer notes that conditional immortality and annihilation comprise "a verbal distinction that corresponds to no theological difference."⁶⁹ This is certainly largely true at the level of current usage. Even where a distinction is retained, the ultimate end of the wicked remains the same. Thus, Edward Fudge calls himself a conditionalist, rejecting the term annihilationist,⁷⁰ and John Stott calls himself an annihilationist, but, although they differ in their anthropology, they are substantially agreed on the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous, the latter being extinguished after a period of penal suffering. This suggests that the question of the immortality of the soul is not a decisive issue in this debate.⁷¹ In this thesis I will use the term 'Annihilationism' to cover both positions, since I think that it better focuses on the distinctive of this position, in contrast to Traditionalism: the final extinction of the wicked. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis 'annihilationist' will be used inclusively of those holding a 'conditionalist' position; and 'Annihilationism' as inclusive of 'Conditionalism.'

B.B. Warfield, art. "Annihilationism", in *The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908-12) vol. 1, p. 184.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁶⁹ J.I. Packer, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. K.S. Kantzer and C.F.H. Henry, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 134.

⁷⁰ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 38 n. 2. Harmon writes, "It is very important to note the historical background to Fudge's disavowal at this point. In the 19th century when Conditionalism was at its peak of influence conditionalists avoided the word 'annihilationism' to describe their position because many materialists who did not believe in *any* life after death seemed to have a view which could be termed annihilationism."

[Harmon, *Case*, p. 198, n. 15. Italics original. Harmon footnotes Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 197.]

⁷¹ I will argue this at greater length below.

Second, there are at least two different understandings of individual eschatology that have been attached to the term Annihilationism. First, that the damned are extinguished without a period of torment, most commonly at the death of the body; but possibly after their resurrection; second, that they are extinguished after a period of torment, most commonly after a period following the Last Judgement, but possibly at the Last Judgement itself after a period of torment in the Intermediate state. The most important issue here is whether the damned experience a period of torment after the death of the body and before they are finally extinguished. On the first view, in its most common form, the damned are not resurrected but extinguished at the death of the body. Harmon notes that, "This doctrine was held by some 16th century Anabaptists and 17th century Socinians and today it is believed by the Jehovah's Witnesses."⁷² John Wenham comments on this position: "[It] assumes that the first death is the end and that there is no Day of Judgement [for the unbeliever] and that we are not judged according to our works. This is plainly unscriptural and *not the view of any conditionalist that I know*."⁷³ Wenham's statement is clearly inaccurate if he is taken to mean that he knows of no-one who holds this position.⁷⁴ However I think that his statement should be understood to mean 'no *evangelical* conditionalist that I know holds this view'.⁷⁵ The minority form of this position is catalogued by Harmon: "some people in the literature seem to believe that after the resurrection the wicked are *immediately* destroyed,..." He gives no examples of advocates of this position, but Pinnock may be one, whom I will discuss below.

Writing at the beginning of the century, B.B. Warfield describes the majority position amongst annihilationists: "The greater part, however, teach a resurrection for all, and a "second death," which is annihilation, for the wicked."⁷⁶ This is the second view I have

⁷² Harmon, *Case*, p. 197.

⁷³ Wenham, *Case*, p. 189. [Italics mine.]

⁷⁴ One example of a prominent theologian who does hold the first position is Edward Schillebeeckx, who Wenham notes is a subject in Harmon's thesis. [J.W. Wenham, *Facing Hell: The Story of a Nobody, An Autobiography 1913-1996* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p. 262].

⁷⁵ Harmon conveniently presents the chief arguments against this position, of extinction at physical death, under three headings. First, Scriptural: it is difficult to dismiss the New Testament references to the universality of the final judgement (e.g. Rom. 14:10,12.). Second, Tradition: It is these Scriptural truths which are the basis of the affirmation, found in the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, that when Jesus comes again he shall judge all people, and this idea is irreconcilable with God's enemies simply being left in death. Third, Theological: Flowing from a strong doctrine of creation one can argue for the importance of people to be accountable for their use of freedom; a responsibility they could escape if God simply left them in death. Harmon's conclusion is that such a position should be decisively rejected.

[Harmon, *Case*, pp. 263ff]

⁷⁶ Warfield, *Schaff-Herzog*, p.184.

noted. It is the confessional position of the Seventh Day Adventists and is that held by evangelicals in the debate I am examining. Clark Pinnock memorably describes this position as: "Fire, then nothing."⁷⁷ A minority form of this view, where the torment occurs in the intermediate state, rather than after the Last Judgement, was held by White. Powys highlights the contrast with Constable, who held the majority version:

"They were agreed in anticipating a finite post-mortem retribution for the unrighteous. They were not agreed, however, about when this would occur. White had located this during the intermediate state, anticipating a complete end in the second death. Constable, in contrast, located this retribution after the resurrection."⁷⁸

However, no writer in the recent debate follows White at this point.

Misunderstanding over this distinction has served to confuse some of the Evangelical debate on hell. William Crockett notes that

It is common to condemn proponents of annihilation by linking them with sects that believe in the extinction of the wicked after death, like Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians.⁷⁹ If some evangelicals are beginning to deny the existence of hell, they are probably no better than the cults, or so the reasoning goes.⁸⁰

Even Crockett's comments could be more precise. The position of the sects he notes would be better described as "extinction of the wicked at physical death," to avoid confusion with the second death. Harmon notes an example of this confusion: "J.I. Packer and Donald Bloesch lump Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists together, in spite of the fact that the first believes only the righteous will be resurrected, and the second that both the good and the wicked will be."⁸¹ A further confusion is introduced when traditionalists sometimes refer to the hell envisaged by evangelical annihilationists, and yet refer only to extinction, omitting reference to a period of torment. This oversight of a period of torment accounts for some of the references to annihilationists as not believing in hell at all, in other words confusing annihilationists who hold the second view I have noted above with those who hold the first. An example of this looseness is by Grudem who writes, "several

⁷⁷ "Fire, Then Nothing" was the title of an article by C.H. Pinnock, published in *Christianity Today* (20th March 1987). The title of Fudge's book serves as a similar summary: *The Fire that Consumes*. As I will note below, Pinnock's position is actually unclear as to whether he thinks that there is a period of torment before extinction, but he certainly allows for such a possibility in order to allow for degrees of punishment.

⁷⁸ Powys, *Debates*, pp. 109-110. He footnotes White, *op. cit.*, p. 311 point two; and H. Constable, *Hades: or the Intermediate State of Man* (London: Kellaway and Co., 1875), p. 171.

⁷⁹ It would be clearer to say that they hold to extinction at death, rather than after death.

⁸⁰ W. Crockett, "The Metaphorical View", in *Hell: Four Views*, William Crockett, ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 62.

⁸¹ Harmon, *Case*, p. 199.

prominent writers within evangelicalism have used strong arguments to tell us that we should no longer believe in the doctrine of hell,...”⁸² Another example is Moore, whose definition of Annihilationism makes clear the omission of any period of torment: “Those who hold to the doctrine of annihilation believe that the rejection of Christ will result in obliteration, utter non-existence. This will occur at the Great White Throne judgment.”⁸³ It is unclear whether this is simply a momentary oversight or because he believes that the extinction is the distinctive or the dominant element of the punishment. Whatever the reasons, the result is that such usage has contributed to some confusion in the debate. Confusion is not only a fault of some traditionalists. Harmon also notes that Stott’s description of Conditionalism as that position where “nobody survives death except those to whom God gives life...”⁸⁴ serves to identify all conditionalists with the Jehovah’s Witness’ position.⁸⁵

A helpful attempt to clarify the debate and to bring out these two distinctions I have noted is made by Kendall Harmon. He uses the terms ‘conditionalist’ and ‘immortalist’ (rather than ‘annihilationist’) to make the anthropological distinction. He then uses the terms ‘immediate extinctionism’ and ‘eventual extinctionism’ to mark the key eschatological distinction. I will use ‘Annihilationism’ in this thesis to include ‘conditionalist eventual extinctionism’ and ‘immortalist eventual extinctionism’.⁸⁶ Therefore, in this thesis, I will use ‘Annihilationism’ to refer to the position that the wicked are resurrected, suffer a period of torment and are then extinguished at the second death. This is the position of all the evangelical annihilationists I will be studying.

A possible exception to this statement, that all annihilationists hold to a period of torment before extinction is, as I noted above, Clark Pinnock. Pinnock speculates that there could be degrees of torment in the very act of extinction, and therefore no distinct period of torment. However he also recognises that in order to incorporate the notion of degrees of punishment there may be different lengths of time of torment. “I am sure that it is not

⁸² Grudem, ‘Forward’ in Moore, *op. cit.*, p. vii. Grudem is more careful about terminology in his *Systematic Theology*. W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), p. 1150.

⁸³ Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁸⁴ J.R.W. Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), p. 316.

⁸⁵ Harmon, *Case*, pp. 198-9, n. 16.

beyond God's wisdom to figure out how degrees of punishment might enter into this event. Maybe there will be a period of punishment before oblivion and nonbeing."⁸⁷ Thus Pinnock considers that there may *not* be a period of torment before extinction. However, as he is the only annihilationist to suggest it, and he does not do so dogmatically, I will retain my definition of Annihilationism. Thus the usual annihilationist position held by evangelicals, and which is our focus in this thesis, is that the damned are not extinguished at the first death, but are resurrected, punished with a period of torment and then extinguished. The two unvarying elements of this position are that there is a period of torment, which distinguishes the evangelical position from those such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, and that this torment comes to an end with extinction, which distinguishes Annihilationism from Traditionalism. This chronology is clear in Wenham's summary, which I repeat: "Conditionalists... look for the resurrection of all men, followed by the just sentence according to the deserts of each, which will mean anguish (but not unending torment) for those outside Christ, finally terminating in the second death."⁸⁸

1.3.2 Traditionalism

The term "Traditionalism" is used by several writers in the debate, such as Fudge who defines it as that "view which signifies the understanding that hell will involve the unending conscious torment (whether spiritual or physical or both) of the wicked who have been made deathless (immortal)."⁸⁹ The final phrase of this definition is unnecessary and introduces a potentially confusing anthropological element: if the punishment is unending conscious torment then clearly the wicked will have an unending existence, and it is probably best to avoid the term 'immortal'. Therefore for the present I will simply define Traditionalism as the view that the existence of the damned in hell is without end. A common description of this position in the literature is 'eternal conscious torment'. This definition highlights the key difference which I am focusing on in this thesis: whether the damned will exist forever in hell or whether they will eventually be extinguished.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁸⁷ C.H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View" in *Four Views*, p. 154.

⁸⁸ Wenham, *Goodness*, pp. 34-35.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

Kvanvig offers an analytic approach to the doctrine of hell, which serves to clarify this key distinctive of Traditionalism and to highlight some common areas between annihilationists and traditionalists in the current debate. He writes:

First, I consider the traditional doctrine of hell, perhaps the most common one in the history of Christian thought on hell. In summary form, it maintains that hell is a place where some people are punished eternally with no possibility of escape. We can analyze this doctrine, which I call here the strong view of hell, into four separate components:

(H1) The Anti-Universalism Thesis: some persons are consigned to hell;

(H2) The Existence Thesis: hell is a place where people exist, if they are consigned there;

(H3) The No Escape Thesis: there is no possibility of leaving hell, and nothing one can do, change, or become in order to get out of hell, once one is consigned there; and

(H4) The Retribution Thesis: The justification for and purpose of hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted so as to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behaviour warrant it.⁹⁰

One advantage of Kvanvig's analysis is that it highlights the elements of the doctrine both traditionalists and annihilationists share. Thus Traditionalism is, in this debate, that position which upholds all four theses.

Kvanvig defines the annihilationist position as the denial of H2:

The view that denies the Existence Thesis we can call "the annihilation view." Annihilationists thus still maintains (H1), the claim that some people end up in hell, (H3), the claim that no one can leave hell once there; and (H4), the claim that the reason for hell is to mete out deserved punishment. What it denies is that any persons exist in hell. Instead, hell is the condition of non-existence. That is, 'hell' is a term that denotes what becomes of a person whom God literally annihilates.⁹¹

However, while this is helpful in stating what both views hold in common in this debate, Kvanvig, as so many have done in the history of this debate, has overlooked the distinction between annihilationists for whom extinction follows immediately upon death and those for whom it follows a period of torment. Evangelical annihilationists hold to this latter position, and for them hell is a place where people are tormented and then extinguished, and thus they argue that H2 is eventually, but not immediately, denied. Thus the debate between Annihilationists and Traditionalists could be stated as whether the existence thesis (H2) is permanently true.

⁹⁰ Kvanvig, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Kvanvig's analysis is also helpful, because it highlights another important distinctive of the evangelical debate: the majority of writers on both sides do hold the retribution thesis (H4). This distinguishes them from many non-evangelical traditionalists, and some annihilationists, who reject thesis H4. Henri Blocher has observed that "Among the modern, the most popular argument, the very soul of most apologies for the possibility of hell, refers to human freedom. Since the nineteenth century, one notices a systematic effort at discharging God from the responsibility of punishment."⁹² While, as I will note in chapter three, traditionalists often hold *additional* justifications for hell on the grounds of human freedom, they also hold that hell is fundamentally retributive punishment, as do most annihilationists.⁹³ One of the reasons why evangelicals have held on to arguments from retribution is that it also underlies the doctrine of penal substitution, which is the main evangelical doctrine of the atonement, and I will examine the link this establishes between the cross and hell further in chapter four.

However, within "Traditionalism" there are many other secondary differences of opinion. The American scholar Norman Fiering rightly notes, with reference to the traditionalist doctrine: "When the doctrine of hell was fully elaborated, it was more complex and variegated than is sometimes realized."⁹⁴ Similarly, Fudge writes:

One finally concludes that there is no such thing as a uniform, standardized, detailed traditionalist orthodoxy. About all one can count on from traditionalist authors is that they believe the wicked will remain alive forever, in sensible punishment of some description, so that neither they nor it will ever pass away.⁹⁵

Fudge gives a succinct selection of these differences in the second edition of his book:

They disagree among themselves on how the wicked will be able to exist for ever when totally cut off from God, the extent of their number, the case of the

⁹² Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

⁹³ Exceptions to this generalisation are Travis and Pinnock. Travis, in *Christ and the Judgment of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament* (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1986) argues that the notion of retributive punishment is largely replaced in the New Testament by that of loss of relationship with Christ. However he doesn't exclude the concept of retribution entirely. See, for example, p. 77, point 7; and p. 171, point 12. More recently he has written: "I have argued that Paul's understanding of the death of Christ does not include the idea that he bore the retributive punishment for our sins which otherwise would have to be inflicted on us." [Stephen H. Travis, "Christ as Bearer of Divine Judgment" in Green, Joel B., and Max Turner, eds. *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology. Festschrift for I. Howard Marshall* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 344.] Pinnock and Brow comment succinctly: Hell is not retributive punishment." [C.H. Pinnock & R.C. Brow, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), p. 88.]

⁹⁴ N. Fiering, "Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism." in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37/2 (April-June 1976), p. 213. Harmon describes this statement as "a deft understatement." [Harmon, *Finally Excluded, op. cit.*, p.103.]

⁹⁵ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p.412.

unevangelized pagans or deceased infants, the degree and nature of the punishment, and even the matter of possible salvation beyond the present life.⁹⁶ Another, and more succinct, summary of differences is provided by Powys who offers a four-fold classification of controversy over the duration, quality, finality and purpose of hell.⁹⁷

There are however certain features which are common to the evangelical understanding of Traditionalism, and which I will be assuming in my use of the term. These include the view that hell is primarily punishment for sin committed in this life and that the damned continue to sin in hell. Since I believe that these features are the most common position in the tradition I will refer to such a form of Traditionalism as 'classic', where I need to distinguish it from the modified Traditionalism I will propose in the course of this thesis.

Fudge writes of his choice of the terms Traditionalism and Conditionalism that "Although some authors on both sides intentionally use loaded terms to describe the two positions, these words are chosen in the hope of avoiding any unfair connotations."⁹⁸ However the term Traditionalism does signal that this is the predominant position in the Western theological tradition. The ACUTE report summarises: "We recognise that the interpretation of hell as eternal conscious punishment is the one most widely attested by the Church in its historic formulation of doctrine and in its understanding of Scripture. We also recognise that it represents the classic, mainstream evangelical position."⁹⁹ Sachs, writing of the Roman Catholic scene, comments on "the rather modest pronouncements by the magisterium concerning hell..."¹⁰⁰ However, he lists several conciliar statement which affirm Traditionalism.

According to the Provincial Council of Constantinople (543) the punishment of the demons and impious will have no end (DS 411). Lateran IV (1215) states that the

⁹⁶ E.W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994, 2nd rev. ed. Revising Editor, Peter Cousins), p. 5. The final point is still highly disputed as to whether it is an evangelical option, and Pinnock, an annihilationist, is rare in proposing it. [See ACUTE, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92]. (Fudge gives a more extended list of such differences amongst traditionalists in the first edition of his book. [Fudge, 1st ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 423-425.] [The 2nd edition is largely a condensation, although material has been added in a few footnotes, interacting with some more recent literature. Given its condensed nature and limited revision, I will usually quote from the first edition, and all references to Fudge will be to this edition unless specifically stated.]

⁹⁷ Powys, *Debates*, pp. 93-138.

⁹⁸ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

⁹⁹ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁰ J.R. Sachs, "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell," in *Theological Studies* 52 (June 1991), p. 238.

dead will rise and receive, according to their works, eternal reward with Christ or eternal punishment with the devil (DS 801)... The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (1979) has recently affirmed an "eternal punishment for the sinner, who will be deprived of the sight of God, and that this punishment will have a repercussion on the whole being of the sinner."¹⁰¹

I would also note that The Athanasian Creed proclaims, "At whose [Jesus'] coming all men shall rise again with their bodies: and... they that have done evil into everlasting fire."¹⁰²

There is a similarly uniform tradition in the Protestant tradition, to which most evangelicals bear a closer allegiance. Peterson offers a brief selection of Protestant Confessions.

The Lutheran church's Augsburg Confession (1530) affirms, "It is also taught among us that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the last day for judgment and will raise up all the dead... to condemn ungodly men and the devil to hell and eternal punishment."¹⁰³ Presbyterians likewise historically have believed in [a traditionalist] hell, as the Westminster Confession of Faith bears witness: "The wicked... shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power."¹⁰⁴ Baptists also have declared in writing their commitment to the orthodox doctrine. We see this in the Southern Baptist Convention's "The Baptist Faith and Message" of 1963: "Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to hell, the place of everlasting punishment."¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁶

A survey of evangelical confessional statements, mainly from the United Kingdom, is given in an Appendix in the ACUTE report.¹⁰⁷ There they note that there are explicit affirmations of the traditionalist position in the Doctrinal Basis of the British Evangelical Council (1953); the Constitution of The Evangelical Movement of Wales (1955) and the Doctrinal Basis of The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (1922). A

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-9, n. 48.

¹⁰² *Book of Common Prayer*. Although many annihilationists affirm the notion of everlasting fire, but reject everlasting torment, the Athanasian Creed was written with a traditionalist understanding of the phrase.

¹⁰³ Theodore G. Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), p. 21.

¹⁰⁴ *The Westminster Standards* (Philadelphia: The Great Commission Publications, n.d.). Reformed churches likewise affirm the doctrine of hell; see the *Second Helvetic Confession*, chap. 26, and the *Dordrecht Confession*, art. 18.

¹⁰⁵ *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Broadman, 1971), 3:1592. An older symbol, respected by many Baptists, is The Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742, which is modelled after The Second London Confession of 1689. Its chap. 32, sec. 2 is almost identical to the section of the Westminster Confession quoted above.

¹⁰⁶ Peterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-241.

¹⁰⁷ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, pp.136-138.

significant change though is noted in the revision of the Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith (1970), which removed a clear traditionalist clause in the 1846 original. ACUTE suggests that this change may have been to allow annihilationists to sign. In clarifying their own understanding they conclude, "We understand the current Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith to allow both traditionalist and conditionalist interpretations of hell."¹⁰⁸ They then recommend the inclusion of a further clause, "as a means of clarifying what we take to be an implicit openness to conditionalism in the present wording of the Basis."¹⁰⁹ There is therefore some variation in recent evangelical confessional statements as to whether Annihilationism is an option. Certainly this most recent report by ACUTE represent a significant advocacy of a policy to include both positions. However, it should be noted that none of the confessions noted advocate Annihilationism to the exclusion of Traditionalism.

In summary, even in the light of the evidence of recent evangelical confessions, Pinnock is perhaps a little cautious when he writes only of "... the semi-official position of the church since approximately the sixth century has been that hell lasts forever and that human beings thrown into it are tormented endlessly."¹¹⁰ A more accurate statement, which includes the views of theologians as well as confessional statements, comes from Bauckham:

Until the nineteenth century almost all Christian theologians taught the reality of eternal torment in hell. Here and there, outside the theological mainstream, were some who believed that the wicked would be finally annihilated... Even fewer were the advocates of universal salvation, though these few included some major theologians of the early church. Eternal punishment was firmly asserted in official creeds and confessions of the churches. It must have seemed as indispensable a part of universal Christian belief as the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation.¹¹¹

Several annihilationists acknowledge the strength of this tradition. Pinnock declares that the "strongest argument for holding the Augustinian view of hell is the long tradition."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-5.

¹¹⁰ Pinnock, *Fire*, p. 40.

¹¹¹ Richard J. Bauckham, "Universalism: A Historical Survey," in *Themelios* 4/2 (January 1979): p. 48. Bauckham continues, "Since 1800 the situation has entirely changes, and no traditional Christian doctrine has been so widely abandoned as that of eternal punishment." [*Ibid.*, p. 48.] However I would suggest that this abandonment has not been the case amongst evangelicals.

¹¹² Pinnock, *Destruction*, p. 257.

Stott judges that Traditionalism “has to be described as traditional orthodoxy, for most of the church fathers, the medieval theologians and the Reformers held it. And probably most Evangelical leaders hold it today.”¹¹³ He also mentions that his hesitancy to acknowledge his belief in Annihilationism is due to his respect for the “longstanding tradition which claims to be a true interpretation of Scripture.”¹¹⁴ Therefore the use of the term ‘Traditionalism’ points to the prominence of that position in the tradition. I now turn to a brief summary of the annihilationist tradition.

1.4 The History of Annihilationism

In this history of Annihilationism, I shall spend most time on the recent debate which is the focus of this thesis, and only touch very briefly on the earlier periods. The standard articles on Annihilationism usually cite the first Christian annihilationist theory as that of the African apologist Arnobius at the beginning of the fourth century (*Disput. adv. Gentes*, ii.15-54).¹¹⁵ Peterson offers an explanation for including a study of Arnobius, which highlights both the rarity of this position, and the poor quality of his work.

[Arnobius] is included here because a better representative of annihilationism could not be found in the early church, Middle Ages, or Reformation. He does not make much of the Bible, but that may be due to his purposes in writing his defence of the faith, *Against the Pagans*. His theological argumentation is not strong, but that doesn’t mean that there are no good arguments for annihilationism. It does mean, however, that there are no good arguments for it in the period we have studied.¹¹⁶

From the fourth century a leap is usually made to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although there were a number of philosophers and theologians who held that extinction occurred at physical death, there were very few who held to the form of ‘Annihilationism’ which is the subject of this thesis. The chief exceptions are noted by Walker: “as Locke, Whiston and some Socinians believed, the wicked will be annihilated only after having

¹¹³ Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

¹¹⁵ Perhaps the most reliable of the many brief histories of Annihilationism prior to the recent debate is Warfield’s article in *Schaff-Herzog*. The lengthiest, but not always reliable, historical survey is by Froom [L.E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers*, 2 Vols. (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965).]. There are also lengthy histories in Fudge [*op. cit.*] and Powys [*Hard*] as well as specialist studies by Walker on the seventeenth century [*The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964)] and Rowell on the nineteenth century [*op. cit.*].

¹¹⁶ Peterson, *op. cit.*, p.115.

suffered a period of torment appropriate in length to their sins."¹¹⁷ "The real extension of the theory" Warfield comments, referring to writers who *did* generally hold a form of what I have defined as Annihilationism "belongs, however, only to the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period it attained, chiefly through the able advocacy of it by C.F. Hudson and E. White, something like a popular vogue in English-speaking lands."¹¹⁸ Leckie, writing in 1918, looks back to the previous century:

But it was not until the nineteenth century that the doctrine really attained to fullness of expression, or received the support of any considerable number of thinkers. During that century, however, it did achieve a position of considerable influence, and was expounded in several important works both of theology and philosophy; and it is probable that it continues in our day to increase the number of its adherents.¹¹⁹

Fudge concludes: "The nineteenth century saw a revival of conditionalism that swept across national, linguistic and denominational lines."¹²⁰ Wenham writes of "the nineteenth century, which was the heyday of conditionalism among Evangelicals," and he notes B.L. Bateson's estimation that "at least fifty books and pamphlets appeared and many items of correspondence appeared on both sides in Christian magazines."¹²¹ Jim Packer is thus wrong in his claim that Traditionalism "was never queried with any seriousness [by Evangelicals] until the twentieth century."¹²² However, by the time the first edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* was published in 1957 the writer of the article on "Conditional Immortality" could summarise with these words: "Though still used in certain kinds of popular apologetics, it has nowadays but few defenders among serious Christian theologians."¹²³ Since that was written there has been something of a revival in Annihilationism.

¹¹⁷ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹¹⁸ Warfield, *Schaff-Herzog*, p. 185. J.H. Leckie, writing in 1918, judges that White's *Life in Christ* was the most important exposition of Annihilationism from a biblical standpoint. [Quoted in Toon, *op. cit.*, p.176.] Again, H.W. Fulford writes: "[White's] *Life in Christ*, which is justly regarded as an epoch-making book in the history of Conditionalism." [*Hastings*, s.v. 'Conditional Immortality', p. 824, c. 1] Froom also concurs: "more than any other individual in the nineteenth century... [White] was instrumental in bringing the principles of Conditional Immortality to prominence and respect." [Froom, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 322.]

¹¹⁹ Leckie, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

¹²⁰ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 401. Fudge's own list of "a few of the more notable authors" in a sub-section of 'The Nineteenth Century' entitled 'Notable Conditionalists' comprises the following: Richard Whately (*A View of the Scripture Revelations concerning a Future State*, 1829); Edward White (*Life in Christ*, 1846); Henry Constable (*Duration and Nature of Future Punishment*, 1868); Joseph B. Rotherham (The only work mentioned is a letter to the *Christian World*, June 19, 1874.); and Emmanuel Petavel-Olliff (*The Problem of Immortality*, 1891). [*Ibid.*, p.401.]

¹²¹ Wenham, *Case*, p. 181, and n. 27, quoting from a private communication.

¹²² Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹²³ *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1st ed., Oxford: OUP, 1957.) p. 325, c. 2.

The beginning of the recent debate about the endlessness of hell amongst English-speaking evangelicals is probably to be traced to the publication of *The Goodness of God* by John Wenham in 1974.¹²⁴ In his autobiography, Wenham comments on the decision of the IVP to publish this book, with its brief case for Annihilationism: "They agreed to this, and so a great watershed was crossed. I don't think that any other evangelical publishers jealous of their orthodoxy had previously consented to do this at any time during the twentieth century."¹²⁵ Wenham notes two other evangelical scholars in the early part of the century who had held annihilationist views but had found it difficult to find reputable evangelical publishers who were willing to publish their work. He cites H.E. Guillebaud's work *The Righteous Judge* subtitled *A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment*, which was eventually published privately in 1964 but, according to a publisher's note, was "written not long before its author's death in 1941."¹²⁶ In the 1940's B.F.C. Atkinson also published privately a work entitled *Life and Immortality: An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as they are revealed in the Scriptures*.¹²⁷ Atkinson was a prominent figure in English evangelical circles, particularly through the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union during his long career in Cambridge from 1925-1960, and Wenham says that he learnt Annihilationism from him in about 1934.¹²⁸ One other work taking an annihilationist position pre-1974 is J Stafford Wright's book *What is Man?*, published in 1955. In his autobiography, Wenham notes what may have been another influential step in the spread of annihilationist thought, and also offers a more comprehensive list of leading evangelical annihilationists.

In 1954 the Tyndale Fellowship had given a whole conference to the study of the fate of the lost, which had confirmed my belief in conditional immortality, a view shared by many of IVF's staunchest supporters, like Basil Atkinson, Harold Guillebaud, Stafford Wright, Robert Clark and Norman Anderson.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Wenham, *Goodness*.

¹²⁵ Wenham, *Facing*, p. 179. Some years earlier Eryl Davies also described this book as a "watershed." Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹²⁶ Guillebaud, *op. cit.* B.F.C. Atkinson writes in the introduction that Guillebaud, when dealing with the question of everlasting torment in a book for Inter-Varsity Fellowship, found that he could not answer the question satisfactorily and thus this chapter was omitted from the published work and later expanded into this book. Tidball claims that it was "written in the 1930s,..." [Derek J. Tidball, *Who Are The Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), p. 152]

¹²⁷ B.F.C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (Published privately, n.d.). Carson gives the details as London: Goodman, 1962. [Carson, *Gagging*, p. 525.]

¹²⁸ Wenham, *Case*, p. 163.

¹²⁹ Wenham, *Facing*, pp. 178-9.

However only twenty-five years ago Annihilationism was viewed by most evangelicals with grave suspicion, and few public proponents could be found. Wenham himself recounts how when his manuscript for *The Goodness of God* was presented to IVP in 1973, "they were up in arms and a long correspondence ensued which ended with a conference with some of their senior people."¹³⁰ Until the debate begun in the seventies, there was very little dissension from the traditionalist doctrine of hell. One marker of the change that has occurred is the *New Bible Dictionary*, an important evangelical reference work. When it was first published in 1962, it included the following conclusion in the article on "Hell" written by D.K. Innes: "The reality and eternity of suffering in Gehenna is an element of biblical truth that an honest exegesis cannot evade."¹³¹ The revised edition of the same work, issued in 1982, has the same author writing on this subject, but with a different emphasis: "...the New Testament leaves the door open for the belief that while hell as a manifestation of God's implacable wrath against sin is unending, the existence of those who suffer in it may not be."¹³² A similar openness in a standard text is also found, for example, in IVP's *Pocket Guide to Christian Beliefs*. Written by Howard Marshall, it records without expressed preference that "Opinions differ as to whether [eternal punishment] means eternal conscious torment or annihilation."¹³³

Since the publication of Wenham's "watershed" book, *The Goodness of God*, with its brief and modest call for "the serious consideration of the case for conditional immortality,"¹³⁴ there has been a growing number of evangelical scholars espousing Annihilationism in print. Scholars taking an annihilationist line, even if only tentatively, would include the following. J.N.D. Anderson wrote, in the book of a lecture series delivered in 1975,

What must, moreover, be regarded as the traditional view of hell sees this condemnation in terms of an eternal, conscious separation from God; but it would, I believe, be equally true to biblical teaching to express it in terms of a death and destruction which is "eternal" in the sense that it is final and irreversible.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Wenham, *Case*, p. 164

¹³¹ J.D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962), p. 519. Quoted by Harmon, *Finally Excluded*, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

¹³² N. Hillyer, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed., Leicester: IVP, 1982), p. 473.

¹³³ I.H. Marshall, *Pocket Guide To Christian Beliefs* (Leicester: IVP, 3rd ed., 1982), p. 136.

¹³⁴ Wenham, *Goodness*, p. 41. The issue is only directly dealt with on pages 34-41.

¹³⁵ J.N.D. Anderson, *Issues of Life and Death* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), p. 29. That Anderson is indeed talking about Annihilationism is underlined by his reference at this point to Basil Atkinson's book, *Life and Immortality*. [Atkinson, *op. cit.*]

Other evangelical scholars espousing Annihilationism include Stephen Travis, with his *Christian Hope and the Future of Man* in 1980¹³⁶ (and, at a more popular level *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* in 1982¹³⁷); P.E. Hughes in chapter 37 of his 1989 book *The True Image*¹³⁸ entitled *Is the Soul Immortal?*; Nigel Wright in *The Radical Evangelical*¹³⁹; David Powys, with his essay surveying Nineteenth and Twentieth century debates about hell¹⁴⁰, and the publication of his doctoral thesis as *'Hell': a Hard Look at a Hard Question*; more recently still E. Earle Ellis in an essay entitled "New Testament Teaching on Hell"¹⁴¹; and Clark Pinnock.¹⁴² Pinnock's writings on hell can be found in several places, which include the following. In 1987 he wrote a brief article entitled "Fire, Then Nothing" for the *Christianity Today* Institute study of Universalism, in which he asked for evangelicals to consider Annihilationism.¹⁴³ He then defended this position at greater length in a 1990 article in the *Criswell Theological Review*¹⁴⁴, and he has further expanded his arguments in a section of the book *Hell: Four Views*.¹⁴⁵ The in 1994 he co-authored *Unbounded Love* with Robert Brow, which includes a chapter on hell entitled "Hell: Rejecting Love".¹⁴⁶

¹³⁶ Travis, *Hope*.

¹³⁷ Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982).

¹³⁸ P.E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Leicester, IVP, 1989.) See especially pages 402-7.

¹³⁹ Nigel Wright, *The Radical Evangelical: Seeking a Place to Stand* (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 87-102.

¹⁴⁰ David J. Powys, "The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates about Hell and Universalism," in N.M. de S. Cameron ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), pp. 93-138.

¹⁴¹ E. Earle Ellis, "The New Testament Teaching on Hell", in K.E. Brower & M.W. Elliott eds., *'The Reader Must Understand': Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), pp. 199-219.

¹⁴² Moore notes, "There is some doubt whether Pinnock remains an evangelical any longer." [Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 13, n. 41]. Moore rightly notes that "There is a fair bit of disagreement about what constitutes true evangelical belief." [*Ibid.*] Pinnock's move in theology has been labelled a 'megashift' [*Modern Reformation*, Spring 1993], and includes changes in doctrine such as an inclusivist rather than an exclusivist approach to world religions and subjective, exemplarist theories of the atonement, rather than objective and substitutionary models. [See, for example, *Tracking the Maze* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990)]. However Moore continues to label Pinnock an evangelical "to attest to the fact that Pinnock et al. are clearly products of the evangelical ethos." [Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 13.] While I agree with Moore's conclusion, I think that the stronger reason is simply that Pinnock is quoted in the literature as an authority, and thus treated as an evangelical for the purposes of this debate.

¹⁴³ Pinnock, *Fire*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴⁴ Pinnock, *Destruction*, pp. 243-259.

¹⁴⁵ Pinnock, *Conditional*, 1992. Erickson notes that, "In the United States, the most complete argument for annihilation among evangelicals has been offered by Clark Pinnock." [M. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), p. 116]. While I think that this accolade should be awarded to Fudge, it does indicate the importance of Pinnock in the debate. Blomberg also indicates the influence of Pinnock: "... none [of the recent defenders of Annihilationism] has generated so much response as Stott (particularly in the UK) and Pinnock (particularly in the US)." [Craig Blomberg, "Eschatology and the Church: Some New Testament Perspectives," *Themelios* 23/3 (June 1998): p. 21, n. 4.]

¹⁴⁶ Pinnock, *Unbounded Love*, pp. 87-95.

At the more popular level Michael Green briefly expressed his view in *Evangelism Through the Local Church* in 1990.¹⁴⁷ In the context of a discussion concerning those who have never heard the gospel, he states: "Christians, therefore, should reject the doctrine of conscious eternal torment for those who have never heard the gospel just as firmly as they reject Universalism."¹⁴⁸ While this refers specifically to those who have never heard the gospel, and different conditions might obtain for others, the logic of Green's arguments would require that all those who are not saved suffer some form of annihilation. Green concludes, "I doubt very much if [eternal conscious torment] is a genuinely *Christian* option."¹⁴⁹ Certainly Wenham regards Green as an annihilationist from the evidence of this book: "Michael Green also committed to print his belief in conditional immortality in 1990."¹⁵⁰ I would also note Roger Forster's booklet, *Eternal Destiny: Heaven and Hell*.¹⁵¹

Probably the most influential evangelical proponent though is John Stott, who in *Essentials* writes that he holds this belief 'tentatively'.¹⁵² Blanchard comments: "John Stott is the best-known contemporary Christian spokesman said to be in favour of conditional immortality,..."¹⁵³ and Fudge judges that Stott "is generally regarded as the dean of worldwide evangelicalism,..."¹⁵⁴ In *Essentials* Stott writes in response to David Edwards: "You rightly declare that I have never publicly declared whether I think hell, in addition to being real, terrible and eternal, will involve the experience of everlasting suffering."¹⁵⁵ In the light of this it is interesting to note two intimations of reservations from Stott in 1975, quoted by Eryl Davies. In an interview with the editor of *The Evangelical Magazine of Wales* Stott said that he was agnostic about Annihilationism, and went on to say: "Those who emphasise that hell will go on and on have not faced up to the problem of time." Then in his book *Christian Mission and the Modern World* he

¹⁴⁷ E.M.B. Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), p. 69f.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69 [Italics original].

¹⁵⁰ Wenham, *Facing*, p. 234.

¹⁵¹ Roger T. Forster, *Eternal Destiny: Heaven and Hell* (London: Ichthus Christian Fellowship, 1992).

¹⁵² Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

¹⁵³ J. Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press), p. 213.

¹⁵⁴ Fudge, 2nd ed., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁵ Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 314

spoke of a "certain reverent and humble agnosticism about the precise nature of Hell."¹⁵⁶ Wenham sheds another ray of light when he notes that "[Stott] has told me that he has spoken about it for thirty or forty years."¹⁵⁷ I will discuss Stott's position more fully below. However, the impact of the publication of *Essentials* in 1988, with what Blomberg calls "John Stott's famous admission,"¹⁵⁸ is noted by the ACUTE report: "Conditionalism has attracted much greater attention within evangelical circles since 1988."¹⁵⁹

However the most important book in favour of Annihilationism in the current debate in terms of its range and depth of coverage has been written by the American Edward Fudge. In the opening pages of his article "The Case for Conditional Immortality," published in 1992 (but written in 1990), John Wenham notes that when he wrote *The Goodness of God* in 1973, with its tentative espousal of Annihilationism, the three key annihilationist books were those of L.E. Froom,¹⁶⁰ Basil Atkinson and Harold Guillebaud.¹⁶¹ Wenham goes on to note not only what he perceives as the failure of supporters of the traditional doctrine to provide a reply to these works, but also what he judges to be the single major annihilationist addition to this list since then.

So I have been waiting since 1973 for a reply to the massive work of Froom (2,476 pages), to Atkinson's closely argued 112 pages, to Guillebaud's 67 and (more important) to the one additional (excellent) book which has appeared on the conditionalist side: Edward Fudge's *The Fire That Consumes* of 500 pages (Texas: Providential Press, 1982).¹⁶²

In a striking testimony to Wenham's high estimation of these four writers as superior to the others mentioned I would note his comment on a book by traditionalist Ajith Fernando: "He pays some attention to Conditionalism, referring to Stott, Travis and Pinnock, but to no major conditionalist work."¹⁶³ The implication of Wenham's words is that these other books are the 'major conditionalist works'. Peterson also judges that "The

¹⁵⁶ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, p. 112, quoted in Eryl Davies, *op. cit.*, Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁷ Wenham, *Case*, p. 166.

¹⁵⁸ Blomberg, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 5. The ACUTE report also hints at the influence of John Stott in redrafting the Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith so that it would be open to annihilationists. [*Ibid.*, p. 6, p. 66.]. Stott convened the Evangelical Alliance's Theological Study Group during the period of revision from 1967-1970. [*Ibid.*, p. 66, n. 47].

¹⁶⁰ Froom, *op. cit.*

¹⁶¹ Wenham, *Case*, p. 162.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 167, n. 9. Wenham is referring to Ajith Fernando's book *Crucial Questions About Hell* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1991).

four best books espousing Annihilationism have been written in this century."¹⁶⁴ His selection is the same as Wenham's. The importance of Fudge's book is further underlined by comments in a paper given by Kendall Harmon at the same Edinburgh Conference as Wenham delivered his. Harmon's paper was entitled "The Case Against Conditionalism: A response to Edward William Fudge", and he gives the following justification for choice:

There are two reasons for choosing the work of Mr Fudge. First, although not as prominent as John Stott or Philip Hughes, Mr Fudge's work is much more substantial than theirs (500 pages) and is devoted exclusively to the doctrine of hell. Secondly, Mr Fudge's book has been praised for its tone and its thoroughness. Dr John Gerstner, an evangelical Presbyterian who taught at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for many years, recently called Fudge's book 'the ablest critique of [the traditional understanding of] hell by a believer in the inspiration of the Bible... there hasn't been anything comparable to it in this century.'¹⁶⁵

As might be expected, not all annihilationists hold their views with the same strength of conviction. Back in 1918 Leckie noted an interesting trend:

The most significant sign of the times, in this regard, is the increasing tendency among Evangelical theologians to adopt an "agnostic" attitude towards the whole problem of Destiny. This type of thought is, indeed, so prevalent and so influential that it may be well to indicate its general characteristics. For example, it always affirms that the scriptural evidence is inconclusive;... But its most distinctive feature is that it is generally stated in such a way as to show that its advocate inclines towards some positive conclusion... Thus, Dr. Agar Beet, while he asserts, on scriptural grounds, an agnostic view, yet finds no speculative weakness in Conditionalism.¹⁶⁶

In the recent debate there are several writers who would fit Leckie's description of being 'agnostic' and yet inclining to the positive conclusion of Annihilationism. Thus Stephen Travis argues that "... it is difficult to decide between annihilation and eternal torment on purely exegetical grounds."¹⁶⁷ He argues that this ambiguity is the result of the secondary importance of the subject to the biblical writers for whom much the most significant thing about the destiny of the unjust is that they will be separated from God. Compared to that fact there is little point in asking for a more precise definition of their destiny, whether it involves continued conscious existence or not. In fact "once this idea of relationship is

¹⁶⁴ Peterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-2.

¹⁶⁵ Harmon, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-4. The Gerstner quote is from *The Christian Observer*, July 6, 1990, p. 11. Wenham comments on the choice of Pinnock as a representative of evangelical Annihilationism in Harmon's thesis, by noting, "I understand he has done this for reasons of space. He regards Fudge as a stronger representative of this school of thought but considers his earlier critique of Fudge in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* is sufficient refutation." Wenham, *Facing*, p. 262.

¹⁶⁶ Leckie, *op. cit.*, p.196.

¹⁶⁷ Travis, *Hope*, p.135.

seen to be fundamental, questions about the details of the after-life become ultimately irrelevant." However, he continues, "If pressed, I must opt for ['conditional immortality']".¹⁶⁸ Clark Pinnock takes a similar line to Travis on the nature of the biblical material: that it is simply not intending to furnish us with details about the afterlife, although it does tend towards Annihilationism.¹⁶⁹ However, as I will demonstrate below, for doctrinal reasons he comes down strongly in favour of Annihilationism.

John Stott also takes an 'agnostic' position, while opting for Annihilationism. John Wenham notes that, "[Stott] says he prefers to describe himself as 'agnostic' which, he tells me, is how the late F.F. Bruce also described his position... in [Stott's] view Scripture does not come down unequivocally on either side".¹⁷⁰ Stott himself writes, "Scripture is not absolutely plain... The late Professor F.F. Bruce wrote to me in 1989 that 'annihilation is certainly an acceptable interpretation of the relevant New testament passages'. He added: 'For myself I remain agnostic'. My position is similar."¹⁷¹ In *Essentials*, Stott ends his discussion with a cautious conclusion and a modest aim: "I do not dogmatise about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively... I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment".¹⁷² However, Stott can also write of Traditionalism that "emotionally, I find the concept intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterising their feelings or cracking under the strain."¹⁷³ In the light of such strong and definite feelings, one might expect that Stott would deny Traditionalism as a valid evangelical option, but he doesn't, affirming that emotions are subordinate as an authority to Scripture, and thus he formally maintains his more tentative conclusion. Wenham's quote above also described F.F. Bruce as holding an 'agnostic' position like Stott. However, Bruce seems to be more agnostic than Stott from his *Introduction* to Fudge's book, where he writes:

¹⁶⁸ Travis, *Believe*, p. 198. (See his discussion throughout chapter 6: *The Dark Side of Hope*, and the briefer statement in "The Problem of Judgement" in *Themelios* 11/4, pp. 52-57.)

¹⁶⁹ For example, *Conditional*, p. 144.

¹⁷⁰ Wenham, *Case*, p. 166.

¹⁷¹ Stott, "The Logic of Hell: A Brief Rejoinder," in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18 (1994), p. 34.

¹⁷² Stott, *Essentials*, p. 320. Klaas Runia is thus inaccurate when he writes that, compared to John Wenham who "leaves the matter open", "John Stott goes a step further. He deliberately opts for the idea of annihilation..." [Klaas Runia, "Eschatology in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century" in *Calvin Theological Journal* 32/1 (April 1997), p. 133. Italics original.]

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

I suppose that, as the terms are defined in this work, I would be regarded as neither a traditionalist nor a conditionalist. My own understanding of the issues under discussion would be very much in line with that of C.S. Lewis. Lewis did not systematize his thoughts on the subject (and I have not done so either).¹⁷⁴

The difficulty of this statement is that Lewis' own position was unclear and open to different interpretations. Wenham briefly notes, "[Lewis] clearly believed in some continuance of the damned... Lewis, though still believing in the Black Hole [an image of a traditionalist hell in *The Pilgrim's Regress*], has turned it into a very different (and somewhat elusive!) concept."¹⁷⁵

I would also note the more definite agnosticism of Peter Toon who argues that the effort to determine "whether hell means everlasting punishment or annihilation after judgement may be interesting but is both a waste of time and an attempt to know what we cannot know."¹⁷⁶ Rather than comment directly on this claim, I will simply note that the majority of writers do believe that the evidence points one way or the other, even if only tentatively, and I am primarily concerned with a study of these writers. Indeed, I think that the position of Travis and others like him is a declining, minority position in the current evangelical debate which is increasingly being conducted between convinced opponents.

There is also a small but diverse group of writers who in effect argue for *both* Annihilationism and Traditionalism, claiming that their reconciliation is a mystery. One example of this position is Harry Blamires:

We human beings cannot combine the notion of endless torment with the notion of death or destruction. What is endless must go on and on indefinitely. On the other

¹⁷⁴ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

¹⁷⁵ Wenham, *Facing*, pp.261-2. *The Pilgrim's Regress*, (Rev. ed. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943). For an extensive study see Harmon's thesis, *Finally Excluded*, chapter 4, where he studies Lewis as a representative of the traditional doctrine of hell.

¹⁷⁶ Peter Toon, *Heaven and Hell: A Biblical and Theological Overview* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), p. 201. This reflects a significant trend beyond evangelicalism. Harmon notes: "One of the clearest ways in which twentieth century eschatology stands out from that of earlier times is in the degree of agnosticism which pervades the discussion." [Harmon, *Finally Excluded*, p.348]. He then goes on to quote from the 1922 report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York which "serves as a symbol of contemporary eschatological tentativeness. They concluded: "Whether in fact any soul will suffer final loss in either sense [Conditionalism or Traditionalism] it is not possible for man to pronounce." The question "must" be left open, there "must be room in the Church" for all three views. The report goes on to note that "probably the majority feel strongly the force of the argument on both sides and are content to hold their minds in suspense." [*Ibid.*, pp. 348f, quoting from *Doctrine in the Church of England*, The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine Appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922, pp. 218-219.] Harmon then comments that "This would never have been written in the sixteenth century when the traditional doctrine was written in so many creeds; it represents a permanent legacy from the nineteenth century to our own." [Harmon, *Finally Excluded*, p. 348].

hand, total destruction must involve an abolition of consciousness which is final. It could be argued that at the point where the human mind runs up against a brick wall in its exploration of the hereafter it must accept the mystery... the seeming irreconcilability of the notion of everlasting punishment with the threat of total annihilation has been a problem for centuries... the problem is already latent in the New Testament in the competing threats of everlasting fire on the one hand and death or destruction on the other hand.¹⁷⁷

Blamires gives one pointer forward: "The seemingly irreconcilable destinies of endless torment and total destruction can be said to be reconciled only in so far as the apostle Paul reconciled them in his reference to destruction as deprivation of God's presence."

¹⁷⁸ However, he doesn't develop this idea. The difficulty for this position is that it has to counter two sets of arguments: the arguments *both* sides raise to those who take the opposing view.

A similarly agnostic position is advocated, briefly, by Bauckham and Hart who argue from the nature of eschatological language, which is quoted above. They concluded: "Our contention that eschatological language is irreducibly imaginative suggests that we should be content to let the various images stand, not reducing one to another..."¹⁷⁹ This reflects what may be a growing sensitivity amongst evangelicals to the nature of eschatological language in the Bible, and the limits it may place on doctrinal formulations. John Stott, writing in 1993 in response to an article on Annihilationism, says, "In Dr Chan's article I think his paragraph on 'understanding metaphor' may offer the most fruitful way forward in our continuing inter-evangelical dialogue."¹⁸⁰ However, not only are doctrinal arguments put forward by writers like Stott which need to be assessed, but as Bauckham and Hart point out there is the outstanding need to assess a view of hell by its consistency with other doctrines such as the nature of God and the work of Christ. I will aim to do both of these things in this thesis.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ H. Blamires, *Knowing the Truth About Heaven and Hell: Our Choices and Where They Lead Us* (Servant Books: Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1988), pp. 65, 67-68. While coming from a more catholic churchmanship than most evangelicals, Blamires would share the key evangelical assumptions about Scripture, and is widely read by evangelicals.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁷⁹ Bauckham and Hart, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-7.

¹⁸⁰ Stott, *Logic* p.3.

¹⁸¹ Guillebaud discusses the view of Agar Beet under the heading, 'Is the Scripture Ambiguous?', which, from an earlier period, has many similarities to these current 'ambiguous' views. [Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-19]. "Dr. Agar Beet in The Last Things put forward with great learning and ability the view that, as between endless torment and the ultimate ending of existence, the teaching of the Bible is ambiguous. Neither view is ruled out, neither can be held to be definitively proved from the Bible... In sum, he holds that God has not seen fit to reveal to us clearly and certainly what the ultimate fate of the wicked will be,

Another writer who argues that both positions might in some sense be true is Douglas Spanner, who draws on the insights of Einstein's theory of relativity which "seem to indicate that from different points of view a real event may be both on-going and endless... and at the same time over and done with..."¹⁸² He concludes, "The two opposing doctrines [of hell] we set out to examine may not be irreconcilable."¹⁸³ It is noteworthy that the ACUTE report mentions Spanner's view and concludes "hell might be experienced as annihilation but observed as continuing punishment, gradually fading from view."¹⁸⁴ This is an interesting speculation, but since the proposal requires the acceptance of modern scientific theories it has few points of contact with the arguments in the tradition, and has not been discussed beyond the ACUTE reference in the recent literature.

I turn now to the growing number of those who are what I would call strong adherents of Annihilationism, with the accompanying change in tone in the debate. This is illustrated by two quotes from Wenham. In *The Goodness of God* in 1974 Wenham calls for "the serious consideration of the case for conditional immortality."¹⁸⁵ This is simply a call for the consideration of the doctrine with the hope that it be accepted as one of two possible options for evangelical belief. However, by 1991, in his Rutherford House lecture, Wenham is much bolder: "I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine..."¹⁸⁶ This may well point to a new and growing confidence amongst annihilationists, or at least the confidence to make public, that not only is their view an option, but that Traditionalists are gravely mistaken and their view is the cause of great discredit to God and harm to his Church. Wenham probably expresses the growing view of many on both sides of the debate, that the language of 'option' is wrong, when near the end of his paper he says: "*Whichever side you are on, it is a dreadful thing to be on the wrong side in this issue.*"¹⁸⁷ Fudge gives his view by way of a quotation:

beyond the fact that it will be irretrievable and utter ruin." [*Ibid.*, p.17] Guillebaud responds that the language is not as ambiguous as Beet believes. He concludes by arguing, "the doctrine of endless torment is by common consent so dreadful, that only a deep conviction that the teaching of the Bible cannot honestly be explained otherwise, can make it possible to believe that God could punish so... If there is doubt, the doubt must be resolved on the side of the more merciful theory." [*Ibid.*, p. 19]

¹⁸² Douglas Spanner, 'Is Hell Forever?' in *Churchman* 110/2, 1996, pp. 107-120.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁸⁴ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p.125.

¹⁸⁵ Wenham, *Goodness*, p. 41.

¹⁸⁶ Wenham, *Case*, p.190.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190. [*Italics original*].

...[final punishment] is certainly not unimportant. In that light we can agree with the point of the nineteenth-century writer who said concerning the traditional doctrine of hell: It must be loyally proclaimed or else denounced. If believed, it should be preached from the house-tops; if not believed, it should be opposed to the very end. If this dogma be false, it is a calumny against God and a stumbling-block in the way of humanity. All the resources of apologetics would not suffice to counter-balance its baneful effects.¹⁸⁸

If I am correct in arguing that his logic applies to all the damned, then Michael Green is also definite, when he writes, as I have already quoted: "Christians, therefore, should reject the doctrine of conscious eternal torment for those who have never heard just as firmly as they reject universalism."¹⁸⁹ Pinnock is also definite in his Annihilationism when, in dialogue with liberal theologian Delwin Brown, he writes:

I was led to question the traditional belief in everlasting conscious torment because of moral revulsion and broader theological considerations, not first of all on scriptural grounds. It just does not make any sense to say that a God of love will torture people forever for sins done in the context of a finite life... It makes no sense to suppose that alongside the new creation, tucked away in some corner of it, there exists a lake of fire with souls burning ceaselessly in it. It's time for evangelicals to come out and say that the biblical and morally appropriate doctrine of hell is annihilation, not everlasting torment.¹⁹⁰

This greater confidence represents a return to the lines of the debate of the nineteenth century, of which Leckie notes: "This theory [of Annihilationism], somehow, has the faculty of creating, on the one hand, fervid partisans, and, on the other, very determined foes."¹⁹¹

1.5 Traditionalist Responses to Annihilationism

In his autobiography, Wenham records a comment to him from a publisher in 1992, which suggests the recent volume of traditionalist writing: "We badly need a book on hell from

¹⁸⁸ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 435, quoting E. Petavel, *The Problem of Immortality* (E.T. London: Elliot Stock, 1892), p. 267.

¹⁸⁹ Green, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁹⁰ Clark H. Pinnock and Delwin Brown, *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 226-227. It is difficult to reconcile this with his position articulated in *Tracking the Maze* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990). There, in making a distinction between Christianity's essential and non-essential doctrines he suggests that "a diversity of interpretation is also possible" on the non-essentials which include "Is hell a place of never-ending torment?" [*Ibid.*, p. 190].

¹⁹¹ Leckie, *op. cit.*, p. 219. From that earlier debate, I would note an interesting line of argument from Hodge: "The earnestness with which the doctrine of the unending punishment of the wicked is denounced by those who reject it, should convince them that its truth is the only rational solution of the fact that Christ and his Apostles did not condemn it." [C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Co., 1884), Part IV, Ch. IV, p. 874.] In other words the stronger the disagreement the more they are likely to be wrong!

your point of view; the traditionalists are pouring out books and pamphlets;...”¹⁹² While not all of these books were directly in response to Annihilationism, almost all traditionalist books on hell after 1974 have contained some response to Annihilationism. I will note some of the chief ones. Wenham, in his Rutherford House lecture of 1991, states, under a heading “An Answer Attempted” that “To my knowledge there have been four serious attempts at reply.”¹⁹³ The four works he mentions are: the 1986 reprint of *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* by W.G.T. Shedd; Paul Helm’s 1989 book *The Last things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell*; J.H. Gerstner’s 1990 book *Repent or Perish*; and J.I. Packer’s published lecture of the same year entitled *The Problem of Eternal Punishment*. Wenham then adds a further work: Ajith Fernando’s 1991 book *Crucial Questions about Hell*. In his autobiography, published in 1998, Wenham adds just one further traditionalist response to Annihilationism: the 1991 essay by Kendall Harmon entitled, ‘The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge.’ Wenham is highly critical of all of these works. Of the four books, he criticises them for “not answering the conditionalist arguments with any seriousness...”¹⁹⁴ On Harmon’s paper Wenham concludes, “It is good to have this thoughtful and even-tempered discussion of the whole subject, even though it does not seem to me to grapple seriously with Fudge’s argument.”¹⁹⁵

A large number of other traditionalist books and articles could also be mentioned from the recent debate, which include some sort of critique of Annihilationism. I will only list some of the books here. (I will simply give authors and dates; full bibliographic details can be found in the Bibliography.) To begin with there are books which are substantially or wholly devoted to the subject of hell, and which include some discussion of Annihilationism. In addition to those books noted by Wenham above, there are books by Gerstner (1980); Morey (1984); Davies (1991); Dixon (1992); Pawson (1992); Moore (1995); Peterson (1995); Blanchard (1996); and Motyer (1996 [1965]). Gerstner also mentions another reprint of an earlier writer which falls into my definition of the recent debate: “the re-publication of Edward Hickman’s 2 volume edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1838) by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1974 is, no doubt, the greatest

¹⁹² Wenham, *Facing*, p. 262.

¹⁹³ Wenham, *Case*, p. 164.

¹⁹⁴ Wenham, *Facing*, p. 234.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

defence of hell... in the twentieth century.”¹⁹⁶ Edwards touches on many aspects of the doctrine of hell, but the two chief published works of relevance to this debate are (titles and page references from Hickman): *The Eternity of Hell Torments* (Sermon XI, on Matthew 25:46, dated April 1739), Vol. 2 pp. 83-89; *Remarks on Important Theological Controversies*, Chapter II: "Concerning the Endless Punishment of those who Die Impenitent," Vol. 2, pp. 515-525.¹⁹⁷ There have also been several collections of essays which have included traditionalist works, including those edited by Crockett and Sigountos (1991); Crockett (1992); Cameron (1992); and Brower and Elliott (1997). Finally, there have been a number of important discussions of Annihilationism by traditionalists in books not primarily on the doctrine of hell, including: Fuller (1992, pp. 196-203); Grudem (1994, pp. 1148-1153); Carson (1996, pp. 515-536); and Reymond (1998, pp. 1068-1085)

Probably the most influential theologian to take up the traditionalist cause amongst evangelicals is J.I. Packer. His general significance is brought out clearly by McGrath who judges, perhaps rather generously, that “Benjamin B. Warfield and James I. Packer [are] widely regarded as the most significant evangelical writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively.”¹⁹⁸

1.6 Introductory Comments on the Annihilationist Arguments

In the following chapters I will attempt to expound the annihilationist arguments before turning to assessment. There is a great deal of repetitiveness in the literature, with the same basic arguments forming something of a litany. However, as Peterson notes, “None of the four books mentioned [by Guillebaud, Atkinson, Froom and Fudge, which he judges the four best books espousing Annihilationism] offers a succinct summary of the

¹⁹⁶ John H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish* (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990). p. 40. Gerstner was writing about Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Revised by Edward Hickman. 2 vols. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974).

¹⁹⁷ Gerstner quotes extensively from two unpublished sermons on Mark 9:44 entitled “The torments of hell will be eternal,” and dated winter-summer 1730. Gerstner describes them as, “the most complete couplet of sermons Edwards ever preached on this subject [of the eternality of hell]. John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998 [1980]), pp. 73-78.

¹⁹⁸ McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

best case for Annihilationism.”¹⁹⁹ The most systematic of authors in setting out the arguments, with succinct summaries, are Stott, Travis and Pinnock who each do so in brief compass.²⁰⁰ Useful summaries of the chief annihilationist arguments are also provided by some traditionalists, particularly Packer, Grudem, Carson and Peterson.²⁰¹ However, simply because a writer presents his material in a more systematic fashion does not necessarily make them more useful for the purposes of this thesis. Fudge is the clearest example of a writer who covers a wider range of arguments, at greater depth, and more suggestively, than almost anyone else, and yet scatters them throughout his book. There are several reasons why Fudge is more difficult to summarise than many other authors, besides his scattering of references. First, he nowhere expresses his views in brief compass. The nearest that Fudge comes to a systematic statement comes in his final chapter entitled "Focusing on the Issue". However the bulk of the chapter is spent offering criticisms of traditionalist arguments, and traditionalist criticisms of Annihilationism, rather than a positive statement of the arguments for Annihilationism. Second, there is no index (although this has been rectified in the shorter second edition of the book published in 1994). These points may well account for the lack of detailed criticism of the book. The single extended study of Fudge available is Harmon's paper published in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*.²⁰²

My own summary is that there are three main doctrinal arguments used by annihilationists in this debate, with other related and subordinate arguments. The first of these arguments relates to the immortality of the soul, and I will examine it in the remainder of this chapter since it is a less fruitful avenue of debate. I will examine each of the other two main arguments, along with some related and subordinate points, in each of the subsequent chapters. In chapter two I will examine the argument that the traditionalist punishment of hell is unjustly severe (both Stott and Pinnock head this 'Justice'²⁰³) and therefore Annihilationism is to be accepted because less severe; in chapter three that Traditionalism

¹⁹⁹ Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

²⁰⁰ Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-319; Travis, *Hope*, pp. 134-135; *Believe*, pp. 198-199; Pinnock, *Conditional*, pp. 143-155.

²⁰¹ Packer, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13; Grudem, *op. cit.*, p. 1150; Carson, *op. cit.*, pp. 518-520; Peterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-178.

²⁰² Harmon, *Case*, *op. cit.*

²⁰³ Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 318; Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 151.

is dualistic (the argument Stott calls 'Universalism' and Pinnock 'Metaphysics'²⁰⁴) and therefore Annihilationism is to be accepted because it avoids the problem. Having responded to the agenda set in the literature, I will then develop arguments based on a link between the hell and the atonement which are relatively rare in the literature but which I believe are decisive.

1.7 The Immortality of the Soul

Many annihilationists, on my definition, are mortalists and hold that the soul is not innately immortal. The key issue in relation to the debate about hell is that mortalists therefore deny that the human soul will naturally survive for ever. For example John Wenham argues that people are mortal due to the self-destructive force of sin, and that immortality is "part of the gift of eternal life bestowed on those who come to partake of the divine nature through union with Christ."²⁰⁵ Hughes gives a broader theological justification for the same conclusion:

To contend that only the human soul is innately immortal is to maintain a position which is nowhere approved in the teaching of scripture, for in the biblical purview human nature is always seen as integrally compounded of both the spiritual and the bodily. If this were not so, the whole doctrine of the incarnation and of the death and resurrection of the Son would be despoiled of meaning and reality... The immortality, accordingly, of which the Christian is assured is not inherent in himself or in his soul but is bestowed by God and is the immortality of the whole person in the fullness of his humanity, bodily as well as spiritual... The immortality which was potentially ours at creation and was forfeited at the fall is now really ours in Christ, in whom we are created anew and brought to our true destiny.²⁰⁶

In each case Mortalism is assumed to be an argument against Traditionalism. The assumption which seems to underlie their charge is stated by Travis: "If resurrection life is a gift from God, then its opposite can only be extinction."²⁰⁷ Travis gives this as the first of his arguments supporting Annihilationism: "The Bible does not teach that the soul is naturally immortal, but that resurrection is a gift of God. This suggests that God grants resurrection to those who love him, but those who resist him go out of existence."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 319; Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 154.

²⁰⁵ Wenham, *Goodness*, p. 35.

²⁰⁶ Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp. 400-401.

²⁰⁷ Travis, *Judgement*, p. 67.

²⁰⁸ Travis, *Hope*, p. 134. Travis is here giving arguments for a broader range of positions than those we have defined as Annihilationism. He says that he is referring to "Belief in the annihilation of the unbeliever at death or at the final judgement..." [*Ibid.*, p. 134.] The former position of annihilation at death

The argument continues that the traditional understanding of hell has been coloured by the premise that humans are inherently immortal: if it is assumed that they will always exist, then annihilation after judgement has not been a possible option. Wenham writes:

The traditional view gains most of its plausibility from a belief that our Lord's teaching about Gehenna has to be wedded to a belief in the immortality of the soul. A fierce fire will destroy any living creature, unless that creature happens to be immortal. If man is made immortal, all our exegesis must change.²⁰⁹

Wenham argues that this may be due to the influence of Greek philosophy on Christian interpretation,²¹⁰ and that traditionalists assume the immortality of the soul although the biblical evidence for it is lacking.²¹¹ Pinnock heads his second argument in favour of Annihilationism "Immortality of the Soul" and he highlights this development:

Presumably the traditional view of the nature of hell was originally constructed in the following way: People mixed up their belief in divine judgement after death (which is scriptural) with their belief in the immortality of the soul (which is unscriptural) and concluded (incorrectly) that the nature of hell must be everlasting conscious torment.²¹²

Travis adds "the claim of the conditionalist is that the 'traditional orthodoxy' of eternal torment arose in the early church precisely because biblical teaching was (illegitimately) interpreted in the light of Platonic philosophy, which involved belief in the immortality of the soul and everlasting punishment."²¹³ One of the main theses of Fromm's massive two volume work entitled *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers*, is that "innate Immortal-Soulism" is the main reason for the Traditionalist view of hell. In the nineteenth century, White wrote: "Here, in the popular doctrine of the soul's immortality, is the *fons et origo* of a system of theological error."²¹⁴

Further, as I noted above, writers on both sides of the debate sometimes make a link between anthropology and eschatology. Thus on the annihilationist side, Pinnock states that the mortality of the soul would fit with an annihilationist reading of Scripture: "The Bible warns against absolute loss in hell [i.e. extinction] and has the anthropological assumption to support that possibility." Similarly, but from the traditionalist side, Charles

is excluded by my definition. However Travis himself does hold a position which is included within my definition.

²⁰⁹ Wenham, *Case*, pp. 174-5.

²¹⁰ Wenham, *Goodness*, p. 36.

²¹¹ Wenham, *Case*, p. 175.

²¹² Pinnock, *Conditional*, pp. 148-149.

²¹³ Travis, *Hope*, p.135.

Hodge writes, "If the Bible says that the sufferings of the lost are to be everlasting, they are to endure for ever, unless it can be shown either that the soul is not immortal or that the Scriptures elsewhere teach that those sufferings are to come to an end."²¹⁵

However, while agreeing that belief in the immortality of the soul has been influential in the history of the debate in favouring Traditionalism, Fudge rightly argues that the immortality of the soul can be logically affirmed or denied by both traditionalists and annihilationists, and thus anthropology does not *determine* eschatology at this point. Fudge has a brief section entitled "False Issues and Irrelevant Distinctions," in which he makes this point that it is a non-determinative issue: "Even the matter of man's nature does not clinch the issue."²¹⁶ Fudge continues: "In *either* case - among mortalists or immortalists - there is no reason why anthropology should govern eschatology. The true Christian position about final punishment must finally stand on a thorough exegesis of the Word of God."²¹⁷ Gray concludes similarly: "[I]t may appear in the end the argument from conditional immortality may be a red herring. For, if Scripture teaches eternal punishment in the form of conscious torment, then other considerations such as immortality are irrelevant."²¹⁸

I will note several writers who illustrate this point in different ways. First, Stott is an annihilationist who holds to some form of the immortality of the soul, although his discussion is unclear at points. Anthropologically, Stott holds that the souls of all people survive death, with the impenitent being finally extinguished. Such a conclusion may be drawn from the fact that Stott calls himself an 'annihilationist,' which he explains as follows:

... 'annihilation' is not quite the same as 'conditional immortality'. According to the latter, nobody survives death except those to whom God gives life (they are therefore immortal by grace, not by nature), whereas according to the former, everybody survives death and will even be resurrected, but the impenitent will finally be destroyed.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ White, *op. cit.*, p.70.

²¹⁵ Hodge, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 876.

²¹⁶ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.76

²¹⁸ Tony Gray, "The Nature of Hell: Reflections on the Debate Between Conditionalism and the Traditional View of Hell", in K.E. Brower & M.W. Elliott (eds.), *'The Reader Must Understand': Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), p.238.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 316

The confusion is that it looks as though he is defining 'conditional immortality', by contrast with 'annihilation', as denying the resurrection of the impenitent, and therefore all post-mortem existence, which as we noted above is the position of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but of no Evangelical annihilationist. Stott's two terms, as defined, thus seem to leave no room for what is the major position among those who believe that hell ends in extinction: that the soul does not survive the first death, but is resurrected for judgement and subsequent extinction. Further confusion is caused because, although Stott denies the immortality of the soul, he is only denying that the soul is indestructible, not that it can survive death, which is what other annihilationists also deny.

It cannot, I think, be replied [by the traditionalist] that it is impossible to destroy human beings because they are immortal, for the immortality - and therefore indestructibility - of the soul is a Greek not a biblical concept. According to Scripture only God possesses immortality in himself (1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16); he reveals and gives it to us through the Gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).²²⁰ Therefore Stott serves as an illustration of the fact that, as I argued earlier, anthropology does not determine eschatology.

Second, Pinnock, who is a mortalist, acknowledges that God *could* give immortality to the wicked, but that there would be a problem "explaining why he should choose to do so."²²¹

Third, some traditionalists hold to the natural mortality of the soul, but argue that God does indeed give immortality to both righteous and wicked. Thus, for example, Fernando and Pawson believe that the traditional understanding of immortality has been incorrect, and admit that some traditionalists may have reached their conclusions concerning hell due to this. However, they proceed to argue that those conclusions were correct due to the positive teaching of Scripture on the subject.²²²

Thus, Christian advocates of immortality have qualified their view by saying that God could annihilate the soul. On the other hand Christian mortalists have recognised that God could grant immortality to anyone he wishes, including the unjust. So, immortalists allow for the possibility of the final annihilation of the wicked, while the mortalists allow for the possibility of the eternal preservation of the wicked. Fudge correctly summarises:

²²⁰ Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-316.

²²¹ Pinnock, *Conditional*, p.149.

The crucial question does not really concern man's natural mortality or immortality, therefore, for both sides concede the ultimate point to the greater sovereignty of God. The issue really becomes a matter of exegesis. Since God is *able* to preserve or destroy His human creature, what does Scripture *indicate* that He *will* do to those He finally expels to hell?²²³

That said, writers like Fudge and Froom believe that "like some hidden footlight, the doctrine has tinted exegesis,"²²⁴ and that,

Although traditionalists formally concede that God is able to kill and annihilate even the soul if He so desires, they interpret all the Scripture passages which seem to say that exactly as if they had declared it unthinkable and impossible. The philosophic view of immortal souls may be officially denied yet wield a determining influence on one's interpretation of Scripture.²²⁵

It is difficult to assess these claims directly, since the charge is usually that of unconscious influence and its force seems to rest on a prior commitment to the annihilationist reading of these texts. While there may well be a link between the immortality of the soul and Traditionalism, and between Mortalism and Annihilationism, and while, if the interpretation of Scripture is ambiguous as to the fate of the damned, then arguments about Scriptural anthropology may tip the balance away from Traditionalism, I have shown that the link is not a necessary one. Thus, this argument is primarily about influences on exegesis and is thus of secondary interest for this thesis. Peterson is right when he concludes that "This argument [about immortality] has been vastly overrated..."²²⁶ I will therefore not pursue it further in this thesis, but turn now to the other major arguments given by annihilationists.

²²² Fernando, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43; J.D. Pawson, "God Of Love, God Of Justice", in *Alpha* (Feb 1993), p. 33.

²²³ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75. It should be noted that Froom takes this a lot further than Fudge, who criticises Froom in a footnote saying: "By constantly ascribing Platonism to immortalists (overlooking important distinctions), he detracts somewhat from his [Froom's] primary thesis,..." [*Ibid.*, p. 55, n. 17.]

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 387, n. 3.

²²⁶ Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

Chapter 2: The Justice of Hell

In this chapter I will begin by expounding the main argument raised by annihilationists to do with the justice of hell. There are a number of differences between writers but, in brief, most annihilationists argue that the traditionalist hell is an unjust punishment because it is too severe. This is understood to be an argument *for* Annihilationism because the hell of Annihilationism is held to be a less severe punishment and therefore more just. However there is a lack of clarity in the literature about the nature and severity of the punishment of an annihilationist hell, and so part of my task of exposition will be to construct a taxonomy of the kinds of punishment an annihilationist hell could be, and how their severities might compare to that of a traditionalist hell. Before moving on to assessment, I will expound a related argument that the traditionalist hell displays God as unloving. My reason for including this argument in this chapter is that I will argue that the issue collapses into the prior question of the justice of the punishment. I will then assess the annihilationists' chief argument about justice. I will conclude that if annihilationists simply hold that extinction is an infinite punishment then their argument against Traditionalism, that an infinite punishment is unjust, is self-refuting unless they can show that it is less severe. I will suggest that there is some plausibility to the view that extinction is less severe than unending torment. However I will go on to argue that extinction is neither an infinite punishment, nor no punishment at all as some traditionalist argue, but only a finite punishment. While extinction as a finite punishment clearly makes an annihilationist hell less severe, it also raises further difficulties. First, annihilationists then face the challenge of explaining why the damned shouldn't be translated to heaven after their punishment has been completed. However I will suggest that they may be able to avoid this conclusion by arguing that it is a finite punishment but with permanent consequences. Second, annihilationists are left vulnerable to any argument that the damned do indeed deserve an infinite punishment. I will briefly examine the main arguments for an infinite punishment, and suggest that they may have some plausibility, and therefore Annihilationism as a finite punishment is not severe enough. Finally I will propose a modified Traditionalism which I believe offers a more satisfactory resolution of the problem of excessive severity raised by annihilationists.

The importance of this argument about the injustice of the traditionalist hell is stated by Crockett who comments: "Pinnock has put his finger on the issue that bothers evangelicals *most* about the doctrine of endless conscious punishment - that an eternal punishment for temporal sins seems cruel and unfair."²²⁷ The link between the final two terms is that if the punishment is excessive, it is not only unfair but also cruel, being inflicted for some purpose other than retributive punishment. Although Pinnock's terminology is different to my own, the problem of God seeming cruel is equivalent to that of God seeming unloving, and God seeming unfair is equivalent to God seeming unjust, which form the two related objections to Traditionalism considered in this chapter.

Before turning to expound and assess the arguments, I will offer some brief definitions. In the debate the terms 'eternity' and 'endless' or 'everlasting' are regularly used without distinction to refer to a period of time without end. There is usually no recognition in the recent debate of the otherwise common distinction in the tradition between eternity meaning timeless or a-temporal, and endless or everlasting meaning within time or temporal.²²⁸ I will therefore use the terms interchangeably, usually following the usage of the writer I am commenting on at that point. Where I want to distinguish between a state that is timeless or within time I will use the terms a-temporal and temporal. Another term regularly used in the debate to describe the punishment of hell is 'infinite'. Again, this is usually used interchangeably with eternal and endless or everlasting, the logic being that an endless punishment is also an infinite punishment. If a punishment is not held to be infinite then it is finite. However there are different aspects of the punishment which can be described as infinite and finite. First, not only can the punishment of hell be considered infinite in its length but it is sometimes held that it could be qualitatively infinite, in the sense that it was infinitely severe in its intensity. This was sometimes held to be the experience of Christ on the cross,²²⁹ but impossible for the damned in their human finitude. Thus, for example, Aquinas argued that "punishment is measured in two ways, namely according to the degree of its severity, and according to its length of time... Wherefore since punishment cannot be infinite in intensity, because the creature is

²²⁷ W.V. Crockett, *Response to Clark H. Pinnock*, in Crockett, *Four Views*, p.171. [Emphasis mine.]

²²⁸ See, for example, T.V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), pp. 120-138.

²²⁹ I will examine this further in chapter four.

incapable of an infinite quality, it must needs be infinite at least in duration."²³⁰ A second distinction in the aspects of hell considered as infinite punishment is that between punishment as suffering (*poena sensus*) and punishment as loss (*poena damni*): thus the punishment of hell is not solely to be judged by the degree of suffering, but also by the degree of what has been lost.²³¹ The loss of the bliss of heaven could itself be judged as infinite punishment in two senses: the loss of something that continues eternally; and the loss of a bliss that is, in some sense, infinite in intensity. It is on this basis that many annihilationists claim that extinction is an infinite punishment, since it is an infinite loss in one or both of these senses.

The terminology I will use in comparing punishments is that they are more or less severe. This comparison can refer to one of three features of a punishment, or a combination of them. Thus a punishment is more severe if, other things being equal, it: first, continues for longer; and/or second, involves more intense suffering; and/or third, involves a greater loss. The distinction between the second and third points is necessary because there may be both a subjective and an objective level of punishment for assessment. Thus, for example, Chan writes

Can a prisoner be said to be punished if he enjoys being in prison? But this confuses the psychological state which accompanies punishment with the objectivity of the penalty itself. To be shut out of the totally real is an objective punishment, even when the shutting out is freely chosen.²³²

If a particular punishment is less severe than another then it is a mitigation of it.

²³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1948, rpt. 1981), Q. 99, Art. 1, p. 2996; p. 2997.

²³¹ Powys notes this distinction, reporting Leckie, but then draws an odd conclusion: "It can and has been argued (see J.H. Leckie, *The World to Come and Final Destiny* (2nd ed.: Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922), pp. 200-3) that Aquinas did not strictly hold that the unrighteous would suffer everlasting torment: that only *poena damni*, not *poena sensus*, can properly be regarded as infinite. The subtlety of this point seems nevertheless to have been lost and Aquinas has come to be regarded as an advocate of immediate everlasting torment." [Powys, *Hard*, p. 44, n. 10]. The oddity here is to conclude that Aquinas did not advocate everlasting torment, since everlasting torment usually refers to its length rather than its intensity and this is just the distinction Aquinas makes.

²³² Simon Chan, "The Logic of Hell: A Response to Annihilationism," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 18/1 (January 1994), p. 30. In the next chapter I will argue that when it comes to the punishment of hell, the damned need to be lucid about their punishment, which means that they are subjectively aware of the objective severity of the punishment they receive.

2.1 The Annihilationist Arguments

2.1.1 The Traditionalist Hell is Unjustly Severe

One of the chief criticisms of Traditionalism made by annihilationists is that the punishment of eternal conscious torment for sin committed in this life is unjust. John Stott argues from the limiting principle of the *lex talionis* which he explains as follows:

The third argument in favour of the concept of annihilation concerns the biblical vision of *justice*.²³³ Fundamental to it is the belief that God will judge people 'according to what they [have] done' (e.g. Revelation 20:12), which implies that the penalty inflicted will be commensurate with the evil done. This principle had been applied in the Jewish law courts, in which penalties were limited to an exact retribution, 'life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot' (e.g. Exodus 21:23-25).

On the basis of this principle of justice Stott asks:

Would there not, then, be a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and torment consciously experienced throughout eternity? I do not minimise the gravity of sin as rebellion against God our Creator, but I question whether 'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the biblical revelation of justice,...²³⁴

Clark Pinnock uses the heading "Justice" for the fourth of his five arguments for Annihilationism, under which he argues that "... the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell... depicts God acting unjustly. Like morality²³⁵, it raises questions about God's character and offends our sense of natural justice."²³⁶ It is unjust because "It is too heavy a sentence and cannot be successfully defended as a just action on God's part. Sending the wicked to everlasting torment would be to treat persons worse than they could deserve."²³⁷

Pinnock, like Stott, argues from the *lex talionis*:

Consider it on the basis of an Old Testament standard of justice, the standard of strict equivalence: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exod. 21:24)... Did the sinner visit upon God everlasting torment? Did he cause God or his neighbors everlasting pain or loss? Of course not; no human has the power to do such harm.

²³³ Stott's first and second arguments he heads *language* and *imagery* respectively. [Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 315; p. 316. Italics original.] Under the former head Stott deals with the question of the immortality of the soul, which I have dealt with in the previous chapter; and under the latter head he deals with biblical material which I have excluded from consideration in this thesis.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 318-9.

²³⁵ *Morality* is another of Pinnock's headings, the argument under which I will examine below under the heading below, The Traditionalist Hell Displays God as Unloving, p.77.

²³⁶ Pinnock, *Conditionalist*, p. 151.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Under the Old Testament standard, no finite set of deeds that individual sinners have done could justify such an infinite sentence.

However, Pinnock goes on to argue that Jesus operated a higher standard of justice than the *lex talionis* and that this higher standard more accurately reflects God's standard. "The commandment of Moses limited the vengeance of unlimited retaliation, and Jesus limits it still more."²³⁸ Thus under this new standard hell is even more unjust, although he doesn't spell it out any further. Pinnock also notes and rejects the main traditionalist argument for an infinite punishment, which I call the 'classic' traditionalist argument, in the form articulated by Anselm:

Anselm tried to argue that our sins are worthy of an infinite punishment because they are committed against an infinite majesty. This may have worked in the Middle Ages, but it will not work as an argument today... The fact that we have sinned against an infinite God does not justify an infinite penalty. No judge today would calibrate the degree of punishment on a scale of the honor of the one who has been wronged.²³⁹

Fudge also rejects this argument.

This whole logic of "finite" and "infinite" punishment... is totally without biblical basis, springing instead from medieval speculation grounded in feudalistic canons of justice. The entire approach is protested today on philosophical grounds, which is proper since that was also its origin.²⁴⁰

The fundamental principle of justice on which these annihilationist arguments are based is that punishment should be retributive, and thus proportionate. This principle of justice is common to both traditionalists and annihilationists in the debate, with the exception of Travis and Pinnock, whom I mentioned in the previous chapter. However they share the principle that a just punishment is proportionate to the sin, while their objection to retribution is because it is usually understood to be a punishment inflicted from without. Thus the difference between the two positions is not over the principle of justice but over its application. So, Wenham can write: "My problem is, not that God punishes, but that the punishment traditionally ascribed to God seems neither to square with Scripture nor to be *just*."²⁴¹ This argument also featured prominently in the earlier debate in the nineteenth century, and an example is from Henry Constable: "the punishment which the theory of Augustine supposes that God will inflict is infinitely too great, and we are therefore to

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

²⁴⁰ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

²⁴¹ Wenham, *Case*, p. 185. [Italics original.]

reject it as untrue."²⁴² In a similar vein: "Now we allow that the Augustinian theory of punishment is infinitely more terrible than ours. Between the two there is and can be *no comparison*. It is idle to compare them - as idle as to compare time with eternity."²⁴³ Indeed this criticism of the eternity of a traditionalist hell is not limited to annihilationists, but has long been perceived as a difficulty. One quote will suffice to illustrate this:

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the orthodox theologian on the subject of hell was the problem of justifying an "eternity" of torment for the sins of a brief terrestrial life. The eternity was the very "hell of hell," as many commentators observed, the incomprehensible and stupefying fact that the torture would never, never end.²⁴⁴

This issue of justice is also recognised as a key annihilationist argument by traditionalists. Packer notes it as the second of four arguments that annihilationists use: "Second, it is said that everlasting retribution would be needless cruelty, since God's justice does not appear to require it."²⁴⁵ Grudem notes as the third of four arguments: "the apparent injustice involved in the *disproportion* between sins committed in time and the punishment that is eternal."²⁴⁶ A little later he puts the same point in terms of fairness: "the argument that *eternal* punishment is unfair (because there is a disproportion between temporary sin and eternal punishment)..."²⁴⁷ In both these cases it is striking that the objection is understood to be to the everlasting nature of the punishment, rather than its nature as torment.

As I noted above, these arguments are in the form of criticisms of Traditionalism. There is little systematic exposition of the justice of the annihilationist position itself. I will therefore attempt to determine what kind of punishment annihilationists think that hell is, and how its severity compares to that of Traditionalism, before turning to an assessment of it. In order to develop an exposition of the annihilationist position, I will interrogate annihilationists with a series of questions, premised on the fact that the annihilationist hell is made up of *two* elements: torment and extinction. This distinction between torment and

²⁴² H. Constable, *Duration and Nature of Future Punishment* (London: Edward Hobbs, 1886), p. 140. [All references to Constable will be to this work, unless otherwise stated.]

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 229. [Italics original]

²⁴⁴ N. Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards' Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 220.

²⁴⁵ Packer, *Problem*, p. 13.

²⁴⁶ Grudem, p.1150. [Italics original].

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1151. [Italics original].

extinction is implied by the very definition of Annihilationism with which I am working and yet it is one that is rarely explored in the literature. The issues I want to discuss all turn on the nature of extinction, and so I will give just a brief quote to highlight the range of views about the preceding period of torment:

evangelical conditionalists characteristically hold that the unsaved will be destroyed either soon after general resurrection and adverse final judgment [Footnote: Constable, Aldwinckle, Stott, Hughes], or following a more protracted period of divine retribution [Footnote: Froom, Fudge, White, Atkinson, Guillebaud].²⁴⁸

In turning to extinction, I will ask first whether extinction is held to be penal, and conclude that it is. Second, if it is penal, I will ask whether extinction is held to be a finite or an infinite punishment, and conclude that it is infinite. Third, if it is an infinite punishment, I will ask how severe a punishment it is held to be in comparison to a traditionalist hell, and conclude it is less severe. Fourth, to further explore the crucial issue of relative severity, I will ask how the damned in torment view their impending extinction. There will be some overlap between the issues raised by these questions, but they will open up some of the key features of the argument. The conclusion that extinction is viewed as less severe a punishment than unending torment is the expected one given the form of the annihilationist argument. What is surprising is that extinction is held to be an infinite punishment, when it might have been expected to be finite; and that there is a wide range of views as to how the damned perceive extinction, when it might be expected that it would be welcomed in comparison to continuing torment. Of course an annihilationist is not required to argue that extinction is less severe than unending torment, if they are willing to drop this objection based on justice, and there are some statements which suggest either uncertainty or unclarity at this point.

So, first I turn to the question of the penal nature of extinction. Although it is not a common distinction in the literature, logically extinction can be either penal or non-penal. If extinction is non-penal then it is not a separate punishment from torment, but merely the end-point of the punishment of torment. Thus the punishment of an annihilationist hell would consist in torment alone. Such a position would be a clear mitigation of

²⁴⁸ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p.18 and footnotes 20-22. Several of these writers are not clear as to the length of torment, and are therefore harder to categorise than this quote suggests. Thus, for example, Guillebaud writes, commenting on Luke 12:46-48, "Nor is anything said about the duration of the penalty... we are in the region of speculation for time itself is of this world." [Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 32]. The one error in this

Traditionalism, and so it is perhaps a surprise to discover that there are only occasional comments which could be understood as pointing to a non-penal understanding of extinction.²⁴⁹ However, in each case I have found there is clear reason to believe that this is not actually the position of the writer.

Constable is clear that Annihilationism is a mitigation of the severity of hell, and it might seem from the following quote that he understands extinction as non-penal:

This [second] death is attended and produced by such various degrees of pain as God in his justice and wisdom thinks fit to inflict. The attendant pain with its issue in death *are not two distinct punishments; but are one punishment*, varying in degree of suffering according to the guilt of the object.²⁵⁰

However, Constable makes very clear elsewhere that he believes extinction *is* penal, and indeed an infinite punishment. In response to the argument that if punishment is not felt it is not punishment (which I examine below), Constable argues that “*Endless annihilation is an endless or an infinite punishment... Annihilation, therefore, is an infinite punishment, both as it is endless, and as the quality of good lost is infinite... Final annihilation then is an infinite evil, as it is inflicted in disapprobation of sin.*”²⁵¹ As part of his argument for this claim Constable uses the analogy of execution, which is penal and severe.²⁵² Thus Constable introduces several features of this issue which I will note more than once: the link between hell as endless and infinite; the use of the analogy of execution for extinction; and the claim that an annihilationist hell is an infinite punishment.

John Wenham can also be understood to be adopting a non-penal view when he writes, “For those who have rejected the love of God there will be after the last judgment just retribution varying in severity according to individual desert, but (in my view) the sufferings will end speedily and mercifully in the second death.”²⁵³ The impression is given of extinction being closer to euthanasia than execution.²⁵⁴ The same conclusion

list is the categorisation of White, who is unique amongst those listed in locating the period of torment in the intermediate state, with extinction immediately after the Final Judgment. [White, *op. cit.*, pp. 311-2].

²⁴⁹ It is however a charge made by Traditionalists. Fudge writes, “Traditionalists sometimes object that irreversible (therefore endless) extinction is actually no ‘punishment’ at all.” [Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 123]

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10. [Italics mine.]

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24. [Italics original]

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁵³ Wenham, *Goodness*, pp. 77-78.

²⁵⁴ In the terms of this section, Kvanvig argues that euthanasia is actually just as penal as execution. Arguing from a doctrine of divine conservation, he concludes, “the distinction between killing and letting die, although important in some contexts, is not relevant here...[T]here is no distinction between the conditional immortality view, which wishes to picture annihilation in terms of omission, and some strictly

seems warranted when he writes, "... there is an *infinite difference* between the most shocking sufferings that come to an end, and sufferings which go on for ever."²⁵⁵ Yet earlier Wenham seems to make its penal quality clear: "It is an everlasting punishment, but not an everlasting punishing."²⁵⁶

John Stott states that "The debate about hell concerns not the eternity but the nature of the punishment, whether the wicked will endure conscious torment for ever or be destroyed/annihilated for ever."²⁵⁷ However, he concludes his brief argument for the rejection of a hell of unending torment with a statement which is hard to reconcile with penal extinction: "unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost continues throughout eternity."²⁵⁸ If the torment of hell can only continue if the damned continue to sin, thus deserving further retributive punishment, then it suggests that at the end of their period of torment the damned deserve no further punishment. In this case extinction is simply the end of the period of punishment and not a part of it. However this is a very slight thread to hang this conclusion on. Further I think that it is an unlikely conclusion since Stott applies the biblical language of destruction, which has a penal aspect, to extinction.²⁵⁹ However, other writers are clear that extinction is penal.

Fudge is explicit that extinction is penal. Commenting on the phrase 'eternal destruction' he writes, "This destruction is not accidental, nor is it self-inflicted. It is the penal outcome of God's judgment. It is punishment, in this instance capital punishment... It is truly, "everlasting" or "eternal" punishment..."²⁶⁰ In his book, Fudge makes a more extensive use of this analogy of capital punishment:

It is sometimes argued that everlasting extinction implies something less than an 'eternal' punishment... it may be worth re-emphasizing that the duration of final punishment is clear; the question concerns its nature. We measure capital punishment, for example, by its permanency, not by the time required for its execution... Somebody facing capital punishment will derive little comfort from the thought that their actual pain will be brief. The sentence is not measured in

conceived annihilation view, which pictures annihilation in terms of commission. Only one type of annihilation exists..." [*Op. cit.*, p. 71]

²⁵⁵ Wenham, *Goodness*, p.91. [Italics. mine.]

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁵⁷ Stott, *Logic*, pp. 33-34.

²⁵⁸ Stott, *Essentials*, p. 319. I will argue in the following chapter that this possibility of continuing sin is to be rejected, a key reason being that it results in an unacceptable dualism.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

²⁶⁰ E.W. Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked" in *JETS* 27/3 (September 1984), p. 333.

terms of pain. This same reality, recognized by courts and criminals throughout the earth, also answers the objection that eternal extinction is really no punishment. For all agree that instant death before a firing squad is rightly regarded as a far greater penalty than even a lifetime in prison.²⁶¹

Fudge leaves a number of issues unclear. If capital punishment is worse than life imprisonment in this life, why doesn't he conclude that extinction is more severe than unending torment in hell? How severe must the conditions of a traditionalist hell become before extinction becomes a preferred option? I will touch on these issues further below.

Finally some brief comments from two other annihilationists also make clear the penal nature of extinction. Guillebaud imagines an objector who uses the analogy of capital punishment for the extinction of the damned to ask why there is the need for torments as well in an annihilationist hell. In accepting the assumption that there is an analogy with capital punishment, it shows that he holds that it is penal.

[W]e... who acknowledge that the ultimate fate of the wicked is the end of conscious existence... must answer the question, "Then why torment them first?" In earthly justice, it is acknowledged by all civilized people that the death penalty is the supreme punishment, and that no unnecessary suffering should ever be added to it...²⁶²

His response is that the analogy breaks down because God has a greater task than any human judge, in particular the exact retribution of sin for which varying periods of torment allow.²⁶³ Finally, Froom argues that after the resurrection the wicked will endure divinely inflicted suffering "proportionate to the demands of the just judgement of God" as the "preliminary phase of the total punishment," the culmination of which was extinction.²⁶⁴

In conclusion, it seems to be the uniform position in the literature that extinction is held to be penal by annihilationists. However, if extinction is penal, then my second question is whether it is held to be a finite or an infinite punishment, where it is infinite because it is unending in time, or because it is the loss of the infinite good of heaven. Carson certainly understands many annihilationists to hold that it is finite when he counters: "One must not firmly conclude (as many annihilationists do) that punishment must be finite because we are finite and our actions are finite."²⁶⁵ This would seem to be a valid conclusion to draw

²⁶¹ Fudge, 2nd ed., *op. cit.*, p. 207.

²⁶² Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

²⁶⁴ Froom, *op. cit.*, p. 496.

²⁶⁵ Carson, *Gagging*, p. 534, n. 52.

from their argument that infinite punishment is excessive punishment for finite sins. However I have found no clear references from annihilationists in the recent literature to extinction being only a finite punishment. There are however several clear references to extinction as an infinite punishment. I have already quoted Stott above who states this ("The debate about hell concerns not the eternity...").

Wenham also referred to an "everlasting punishment" above, and also argued that "To sin means ultimately to forfeit heaven, and this is the greatest possible punishment which anyone can ever receive, *and this is the punishment which sin deserves*. Compared with this all other punishments, however terrible, are relatively insignificant."²⁶⁶ Another example is Fudge. As well as the quote above, I would add the following:

If death is seen to be destruction without limitation (which the traditional view has not allowed), then is not penal death [extinction] *itself* an *infinite* punishment, especially if it is an eternal death which is forever irreversible?"²⁶⁷ Again, "both Augustine and Jonathan Edwards conceded that such a situation [of extinction] would satisfy the expression "eternal punishment",...

Fudge also introduces another sense in which extinction can be thought of as an infinite punishment, when he argues that the loss of salvation, and not just the loss of life itself, is an element in the assessment of the severity of hell. In the context of a discussion of Irenaeus, Fudge notes with approval Constable's view, who believed Irenaeus to be "a witness for his position."²⁶⁸ "Constable argues that Irenaeus thinks that future punishment is "eternal" because "it is the loss of blessing which is eternal. It does not consist in eternally inflicting new misery, but in the eternal loss of what might have been eternally enjoyed."²⁶⁹ Dixon, a traditionalist, also argues that the severity of the punishment is to be determined by the loss incurred, and he concludes that it is infinite since it is the loss of an eternity of bliss in heaven.²⁷⁰ Thus annihilationists hold that extinction is an eternal or infinite punishment.

I now turn to my third question: if extinction is an infinite punishment, how severe a punishment is it held to be in comparison to a traditionalist hell, which is also an infinite

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70. [Italics original].

²⁶⁷ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 333, n. 17, quoting Constable, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

²⁷⁰ Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

punishment? Given that the argument against Traditionalism turns on Annihilationism being a mitigation of Traditionalism, it would be expected that eternal torment would be considered the greater punishment. However, as so often in the literature, annihilationists are less clear than might be expected. So I will set out a brief taxonomy. Logically there could be three positions, which I will note, along with annihilationists who seem to offer support. First, it could be argued that unending torment and unending extinction are equally severe punishments. Surprisingly, Fudge seems to hold this position when he quotes from and comments on Jonathan Edwards' *Concerning the Endless Punishment of Those Who Die Impenitent*.

In a lengthy paragraph (#31) Edwards responds to the idea that the wicked will suffer penal pains according to the precise measure of divine justice, then will be exterminated.

"On this," he writes, "I would observe that there is nothing got by such a scheme; no relief from the arguments taken from Scripture, for the proper eternity of future punishment."²⁷¹ In other words, sinners can find no comfort in this understanding of hell, for it is *as properly eternal and scripturally horrible* as the common view of unending conscious torment! He reaffirms the concession at the end of his paragraph.²⁷²

In quoting Edwards, Fudge seems to affirm that extinction is an equally severe punishment as the traditionalist hell. However, as I have mentioned, a priori this is a very unlikely position for Fudge or any other annihilationist to hold, since it would immediately refute his argument about the unjust severity of a traditionalist hell. Although he doesn't state this, Fudge seems to be making an ad hominem argument to support the notion that extinction is a punishment, in response to those who claim that it is no punishment at all.²⁷³

Second, it could be argued that extinction is a *more* severe punishment than Traditionalism. This is even more unlikely a position for an annihilationist if they hold that Traditionalism is unjustly severe. However, the regular use of the analogy from capital punishment, and the recognition that it is a more severe punishment than life imprisonment, suggests just such a conclusion. Fudge writes,

Traditionalists sometimes object that irreversible (therefore endless) extinction is actually no 'punishment' at all. Yet throughout human history people have willingly chosen the *severest tortures*, life imprisonment, or exile into intolerable

²⁷¹ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 515-525; quotation on p. 524.

²⁷² Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 200. [Italics mine].

²⁷³ I will pick up the point made by Edwards, that if extinction is an infinite punishment then this means that there is no need for any preceding torment, below, pp. 85-86.

circumstances and total isolation rather than lose their expected years of life... as Constable pointed out,

"From the earliest records of our race *capital* punishment has been reckoned as not only the greatest but also the most lasting of all punishments; and it is only reckoned the greatest because it is the most lasting. A flogging, inflicted on a petty thief, inflicts more actual pain than decapitation or hanging inflicts upon a murderer. Why then is it [i.e. capital punishment] greater and more lasting? Because it has deprived the sufferer of every hour of that life which but for it he would have had. *Its duration is supposed co-existent with the period of his natural life.*"²⁷⁴

However, as above, Fudge seems to be making an ad hominem argument to counter the charge that extinction is *no* punishment by showing that the analogous punishment of execution is considered penal. However, it does highlight the need for any annihilationist who argues from penal analogies in this life, to show why, if execution is considered a more severe punishment than life imprisonment, it doesn't lead to the conclusion that extinction is more severe than eternal torment.

Third, it could be argued that extinction is *less* severe. Constable, despite his use of the analogy of capital punishment above, goes on to state very clearly that Annihilationism is indeed less severe: "Now we allow that the Augustinian theory of punishment is infinitely more terrible than ours. Between the two there is and can be *no comparison*. It is idle to compare them - as idle as to compare time with eternity."²⁷⁵ While the language of "no comparison" and "an infinite difference" is polemical rather than precise, it does clearly highlight that annihilationists see extinction as a mitigation of the severity of Traditionalism. Pinnock writes of "the ultimate of penalties - everlasting conscious torment."²⁷⁶ This implies that extinction is less than the 'ultimate' penalty in terms of severity. This is what is expected from the form in which the annihilationist argument about justice is presented: if it is believed that the argument that Traditionalism is unjust because it is too severe a punishment is an argument *for* Annihilationism, then Annihilationism must be a less severe punishment. This conclusion is also clearly perceived by traditionalists. Gomes, for example, states: "Yet the whole point of the annihilationist's argument is to mitigate the horror of eternal suffering for the lost..."²⁷⁷ I think that Gomes overstates the case in claiming this is the 'whole point', but I think he is

²⁷⁴ Fudge, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199, quoting Constable, *op. cit.*, p. 12. [Italics mine].

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

²⁷⁶ Pinnock, *Conditional*, pp. 151-2.

right that annihilationists do view their position as a mitigation of the severity of Traditionalism. To quote Kvanvig again, who offers a more measured assessment, "... the annihilation view... has been perceived over the last few centuries as a mitigation of the strong view of hell."²⁷⁸ This then raises the question of how extinction can be both an infinite punishment and yet a less severe punishment than Traditionalism. This issue is not addressed directly in the literature. I will argue below that such an argument could be made, but that annihilationists need to work at formulating it.

Fourth, I turn to the question of how the damned in an annihilationist hell view their extinction. The purpose of this investigation is to gain further information about how annihilationists understand the severity of extinction. As with the above issue, I have found no clear discussion of this question in the annihilationist literature. There are two issues here which need to be distinguished, which correspond to extinction viewed objectively and subjectively by the damned: objectively, the relative penal value and, subjectively, the relative severity of the two elements understood here as the intensity of the suffering. First, there is the relative penal value of the two elements. One might expect that the period of torment could not be viewed as anything but insignificant alongside an 'infinite punishment' of extinction. However Wenham seems to suggest that the torment is actually the greater part of the punishment, although some elements of the argument are problematic.

Some argue that destruction is no punishment, since many an unbeliever wants to die, so mere death would be a denial of justice. This assumes that the first death is the end and that there is no Day of Judgement and that we are not judged according to our works. This is plainly unscriptural and not the view of any conditionalist that I know. The very wicked who have suffered little in this life will clearly get what they deserve. Perhaps a *major part of the punishment* will be a realisation of the true awfulness of their sin...²⁷⁹

I am taking 'the major part of punishment' to be a reference to the period of torment before extinction. The problem that this leaves an annihilationist like Wenham to explain is in what sense torment can be the major part of a punishment that includes extinction which is in itself an infinite punishment. Fudge is clear that extinction *is* the greater part of

²⁷⁷ A.W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell, Part One," in *Christian Research Journal* (Spring 1991), p. 18.

²⁷⁸ Kvanvig, *op. cit.*, p. 68. Although, as I noted in the previous chapter, Kvanvig's definition of the annihilation view includes the position of extinction at physical death, his point still stands for the position I am examining.

²⁷⁹ Wenham, *Case*, p. 189. [Italics mine.]

the punishment, although his arguments are not clear at every point. This quote comes in the context of a discussion of the biblical phrases 'eternal destruction' and 'eternal punishment'.

[W]e suggest that this 'eternal destruction' will be the penal suffering exactly suited to each degree of guilt by a holy and just God, but that penal suffering is not itself the ultimate retribution or punishment. There will be an act of destroying, resulting in a destruction that will never end or be reversed... In keeping with their scriptural usage, we suggest that the 'punishment' here includes whatever penal suffering God justly awards to each person but *consists primarily of the total abolition and extinction of the person for ever*. The punishing continues until the process is completed, and then it stops. But the punishment which results will remain for ever.²⁸⁰

Therefore extinction is the major part of the punishment of Annihilationism.

Second, there is the question of the relative severity of each element, understood as the intensity of the suffering, which I will approach by way of a question: do those in torment desire extinction or not? The assumption here is that the damned in hell will desire the future punishment they perceive as involving the least suffering. Thus, if continued torment is considered less severe than extinction, it will be the desired state. It is of course arguable that the damned will decide irrationally, or that each person will decide by different criteria, or that they have no relevant desires. However, where writers in the debate do comment, none takes these positions. However, there are three answers I will briefly consider: the damned do not desire extinction because it is more severe; they are indifferent to the matter since it is equally severe; or they desire extinction, because it is less severe. I will examine each in turn. It should be noted though that some writers make statements which seem to fit more than one position.

First, extinction could be viewed as more severe a punishment than continued torment and thus not desired by the damned. As with the discussion above about relative penal values, a priori this would seem to be an unlikely position for an annihilationist to adopt since it would make the annihilationist hell more severe than Traditionalism. However Guillebaud argues that the damned will *not* desire extinction. "The instinct, which so often makes even the suicide struggle desperately for life at the last, will surely be far more powerful as the soul faces the final disintegration of personality, the utter end, and what an awful

²⁸⁰ Fudge, 2nd ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19. [Italics mine].

end!"²⁸¹ It therefore seems that for Guillebaud extinction is no merciful release. There is some lingering uncertainty though when Guillebaud talks about a 'suicide'. This may suggest that while the damned don't desire extinction for itself, they still desire extinction rather than the continuation in existence. Such a distinction would enable an annihilationist to hold that extinction is an infinite but less severe punishment than unending torment. Wenham though excludes this option when he states,

If it is said that conditionalism devalues the terror of the biblical deterrents... and many tormented people might welcome annihilation, conditionalists would reply... It is doubtful if anyone really desires annihilation. Man clings tenaciously to life, and it is arguable that the prospect of annihilation is the most dreadful of all fates.²⁸²

Fudge also excludes this option when he argues, by analogy, that the true horror of hell is not the temporary torment but the prospect of extinction: "... throughout human history men have willingly chosen the severest tortures, life imprisonment, or exile into intolerable circumstances and total isolation rather than face the final cutting off of their expected years of life."²⁸³ I would also note that Fudge believes that "the wicked do not happily and quietly fade away."²⁸⁴ But if the wicked do not happily fade away, then presumably they would rather continue in torment than be extinguished. If maintained this would make it impossible to maintain that Annihilationism is less severe.

Second, the damned could be indifferent to the matter since extinction and continuing torment are considered equally severe. Travis is ambivalent as to which would be the most fearful: unbelievers will be separated from Christ, and "Compared with that tragic fact, there is - according to the New Testament writers - little point in asking whether the lost continue to be conscious or are annihilated."²⁸⁵ Moore claims other writers hold a position of equivalence. 'Amazingly, neither Pinnock nor Hughes sees annihilation as mitigating its awfulness!' However neither of the references he footnotes seem to substantiate this claim.²⁸⁶ However, this leads to the same question as when extinction is more severe: how can Annihilationism be less severe, but extinction not desired in comparison to continuing torment?

²⁸¹ Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 37

²⁸³ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

²⁸⁵ Travis, *Hope*, p. 136.

²⁸⁶ Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30. He footnotes Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 407 and Pinnock, *Destruction*, p. 259.

Third, extinction could be viewed as less severe than the torments of hell and thus something to be comparatively welcomed. Thus Wenham, for example, writes, "(in my view) the sufferings will end speedily and mercifully in the second death."²⁸⁷ This does not necessarily mean that extinction is desired for its own sake, nor that it is not penal, but that it is less severe and thus more desirable than the alternative of continuing conscious torment. The impression is of extinction being closer to a form of euthanasia than execution. If, as I have argued, the annihilationist believes their position is a mitigation of Traditionalism then it would seem to follow that they would hold that extinction is less severe than unending torment.

A further question which arises if there are two elements to the punishment of an annihilationist hell is: what are torment and extinction respectively the punishments for? As so often in the literature, there is little, if any discussion or even reference to the question. As I noted in the previous chapter, a ready distinction lies to hand in the tradition: Aquinas, for example, argues that the deprivation of heaven is punishment for original sin, while positive degrees of torment are punishment for sins committed in life. The annihilationist could perhaps draw on this tradition to argue that extinction is the punishment for original sin and the period of torment the punishment for sins committed in life. However there has been no discussion of this issue.

In conclusion, I have argued that annihilationists hold that an annihilationist hell is a mitigation of the traditionalist hell. From this it follows that it is less severe. Thus they hold that extinction is an infinite punishment, while also maintaining that it is less severe a punishment than the hell of Traditionalism. There is no attempt to provide an argument to justify an infinite punishment. From the premise that Annihilationism has two elements to its punishment (torment and extinction) it follows that extinction ought to be welcomed by the damned in comparison with the prospect of continued torment. However leading annihilationists like Fudge avoid this conclusion without clear justification.

Before making an assessment of the annihilationist argument, I will turn to a related argument about the love of God.

2.1.2 The Traditionalist Hell Displays God as Unloving

Several annihilationists, and indeed some traditionalists in their summaries of Annihilationism, give a separate argument from the goodness or love of God. As with many of the annihilationist arguments, it is presented as an argument *for* Annihilationism, although it is in the form of a criticism of Traditionalism. The argument is that the traditionalist hell displays God as unloving or cruel. I include it in this chapter because we will argue that in fact the criticism depends upon the prior question of the justice of hell.

An example of this argument is Pinnock's third argument for annihilation which is headed *Morality*. He writes, "... the traditional view,... depicts God acting in a way that contradicts his goodness and offends our moral sense."²⁸⁸ Under this heading Pinnock also argues that "Unending torment would be utterly pointless, wasted suffering that could never lead to anything good."²⁸⁹ Pinnock can sometimes use even more forceful language when framing this point, concluding that the God of Traditionalism has similarities to Satan in his cruelty.

Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who could do such things is more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by any ordinary moral standards, and by the Gospel itself... Surely the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ is no fiend; torturing people without end is not what our God does.²⁹⁰

Pinnock states the importance of this argument when he writes,

The idea that a conscious creature should have to undergo physical and mental torture through unending time is profoundly disturbing, and the thought that this is inflicted upon them by divine decree offends my conviction about God's love. *This is probably the primary reason why people question the tradition so vehemently in the first place.*²⁹¹

Crockett draws a similar conclusion when he comments: "... Pinnock's most powerful point [is] the moral argument. He wonders whether the 'Abba' Father of Jesus could torture people without end, and what we would think of someone who acted as vindictively as the

²⁸⁷ Wenham, *Goodness*, pp. 77-78.

²⁸⁸ Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 149.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²⁹⁰ Pinnock, *Destruction*, pp. 246-7. See also *Conditional*, p. 149.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164. [Italics mine].

doctrine of eternal hell suggests God will act."²⁹² For Pinnock this argument is clearly presented as distinct from that based on the injustice of Traditionalism, since in his summary in *Four Views on Hell* he deals with the arguments related to justice under a separate head, entitled *Justice*, from those headed *Morality*.²⁹³ The arguments headed *Morality* may even be indicated to have priority since they precede those headed *Justice* in Pinnock's list of arguments, coming in third and fourth places respectively.

However, other writers make the link to justice clearer. Travis also gives a similar argument as the fourth of his five arguments for Annihilationism. "Eternal torment serves no useful purpose, and is therefore merely vindictive. This vindictiveness is incompatible with the love of God in Christ."²⁹⁴ Unlike Pinnock, Travis doesn't give a separate argument about the justice of hell, and thus I think that his argument is of the same form as Wenham's: if hell is unjust, then God would be "merely vindictive" to inflict it. Wenham initially seems to make a similar point to Pinnock:

To any normal way of thinking (and Jesus has told us when we think about God to think how a human father acts) [Traditionalism] depicts God as a terrible sadist, not as loving father."²⁹⁵ Again, "I know that no sinner is competent to judge the heinousness of sin, but I cannot see that endless punishment is either loving or just... Unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice. It is a doctrine which I do not know how to preach without negating the loveliness and glory of God."²⁹⁶

However, Wenham's basis for his argument is that, as I quoted above, "the punishment traditionally ascribed to God seems neither to square with Scripture nor to be *just*."²⁹⁷ Wenham's argument is thus that *if* hell is unjust then it follows that God would have to be sadistic to inflict it on anyone. In Packer's summary of the key arguments he also lists this argument in the form held by Wenham: "Let us look at the biblical arguments used [by annihilationists]. They reduce to four... Second, it is said that everlasting retribution would be needless cruelty, since God's justice does not appear to require it."²⁹⁸

Why then is Pinnock's formulation different at this point? The answer seems to be that Pinnock is operating with significant theological differences to Wenham and most

²⁹² Crockett, *Four Views*, p. 171.

²⁹³ Pinnock, *Conditional*.

²⁹⁴ Travis, *Hope*, p. 135. Travis gives this argument as the fifth of six in Travis, *Believe*, p. 199.

²⁹⁵ Wenham, *Case*, p. 184.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 187.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

²⁹⁸ Packer, *Problem*, pp. 12-13.

evangelicals. The difference with most relevance to our discussion is his rejection of "the ideal of punitive, retributive justice [which] underlies traditional thinking about the nature of hell."²⁹⁹ Pinnock argues that God's nature is "boundlessly merciful"³⁰⁰ and therefore that he would not inflict suffering on anyone unless it made redemption possible. "[Unredemptive suffering] would be punishment for its own sake. Surely God does not act like that."³⁰¹ Thus Pinnock differs not only from traditionalists, but from most evangelical annihilationists too. Although he uses the language of punishment and desert, he actually argues that extinction is motivated by respect for the choices of the wicked:

According to my view, God is morally justified in destroying the wicked because he respects their human choices. He will not save them if they do not want to be saved... To affirm hell means accepting human significance. Sinners do not have to be saved and will not be forced to go to heaven. They have a moral "right" to hell. The God who seeks our well-being in fellowship with himself will not force his fellowship upon anyone. In the end he will allow us to become what we have chosen.³⁰²

The logic of Pinnock's arguments would seem to be that there should be no torment prior to extinction, and if this is true then he ceases to fit the form of Annihilationism which I am studying in this thesis. As I noted above, Guillebaud, who here represents the usual evangelical annihilationist position, answered criticism similar to Pinnock's by claiming that, although punishment before extinction seems vindictive, it is actually necessary to judgement and the redressing of the inequalities that we experience in this world.³⁰³

Thus, for evangelicals, hell only contradicts God's goodness if it is unjust. This point is made clearly by Wayne Grudem:

With respect to the argument from the love of God, the same difficulty in reconciling God's love with eternal punishment would seem to be present in reconciling God's love with the idea of divine punishment at all, and conversely, if (as Scripture abundantly testifies) it is consistent for God to punish the wicked for a certain length of time after the last judgement, then there seems to be no necessary reason why it would be inconsistent of God to inflict the same punishment for an unending period of time.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 153.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 151. Fudge addresses the issue of mercy in hell in a different context, and in general terms, at the end of his book. His conclusion is that "no conditionalist discovered in this study ever argued along these lines..." [Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 433]. This is especially surprising since he lists Pinnock in his bibliography.

³⁰³ Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

³⁰⁴ Grudem, *op. cit.*, p. 1150.

In his point following 'conversely' Grudem is not arguing that an unending punishment is just, but that if it is just then it is consistent with the love of God for him to inflict it. Again, the issue reverts to that of the justice of any particular punishment. This is also recognised by the ACUTE authors who entitle the second of their 'Key Theological Issues', "Love and Justice."³⁰⁵ Their statement of the argument concludes with the issue of justice:

"The argument... is a forceful one: it asks what love and justice could possibly be manifested in everlasting, unrelenting conscious torment, and responds that there is surely a grave disproportion between crimes committed in a single lifetime, and punishment administered for all eternity."³⁰⁶

Therefore I will focus on the determinative issue which is that of the justice of hell.

Before continuing, I would note Blamires' view on the response of love, which also links the issue to justice, but in a different way. Blamires makes the point that love would demand justice since love does not want people to be deceived into thinking that they are good when they are not.³⁰⁷ I will argue in the next chapter that such lucidity about the good is a feature which is problematic in classic Traditionalism, but is a feature of the modified Traditionalism I will expound.

2.2 An Assessment of the Annihilationist Arguments

In the rest of this chapter I will aim to do two things. First, I will first offer an assessment of the possible annihilationist penal theories I have mapped out, and argue that none are without significant problems. I will begin by examining the problems for annihilationists if extinction *is* an infinite punishment. Then I will argue that extinction is not an infinite punishment, because it cannot be experienced as punishment after it takes place, and before hand there can only be a finite appreciation of its consequences. Thus extinction is only a finite punishment. One consequence is that if there is any sense in which sin deserves an infinite punishment, then Annihilationism will be unjustly lenient. I therefore turn to a discussion of whether sin deserves an infinite punishment. I will briefly outline what I call the 'classic' argument for an infinite punishment, and conclude that if this is accepted, then it constitutes a reason for rejecting an annihilationist hell of finite

³⁰⁵ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-106.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁰⁷ Blamires, "The Eternal Weight of Glory," *Christianity Today*, 27 May 1991, pp. 6, 9.

punishment. However, I will argue that there may be some validity to the annihilationist critique that Traditionalism is excessively severe.

Second, in response to this conclusion, I will attempt to formulate a modified Traditionalism which can be interpreted as a mitigation of the severity of classic Traditionalism and thus responds to the chief annihilationist concern relating to justice, while retaining some of the strengths of Traditionalism. This task is not formally necessary to refute Annihilationism, but it strengthens the argument. Drawing on Henri Blocher's work, I will expound the notion of the fixity of the damned. In Chapter Three I will expound the additional notions of the damned ceasing to sin, being lucid, and being reconciled to God in a limited sense, which can also serve as mitigations, but more directly relate to the issue of dualism. In the present chapter I will propose two alternative strategies. First, if the annihilationist criticism of the justice of an infinite punishment for finite sin is persuasive, then rather than requiring a complete rejection of Traditionalism I will suggest that it merely requires modification, along the lines of one interpretation of the fixity of the damned. However, second, if there is some cogency to the claim that sin deserves an infinite punishment, then not only does this rule out Annihilationism as unjustly lenient, but Blocher's modified Traditionalism can also be interpreted as being an infinite punishment. The advantage of this modified Traditionalism over the classic form is that it can also be interpreted as less severe, and thus achieves what I think many annihilationists are attempting to do: to formulate a punishment which is infinite but less severe than classic Traditionalism. This is the position I favour in this debate.

2.2.1 If Extinction is an Infinite Punishment

As I noted above, annihilationists usually hold that extinction is an infinite, or eternal, punishment since it is without end and it involves the loss of an infinite, or eternal, bliss. This raises problems about the justice of an annihilationist hell and the relation between punishment as extinction and a proportionate period of torment. I will make several criticisms, before assessing Annihilationism if extinction is held to be a finite punishment.

First, the annihilationist criticism that the punishment of a traditionalist hell is unjust because it is an infinite punishment is self-refuting if extinction is also held to be an

infinite punishment, without further explanation. Blanchard states correctly that their criticism "begs an obvious question."³⁰⁸ Thus, if Traditionalism is unjust because it is an infinite punishment for finite sin, then Annihilationism is also unjust. To re-cap just one particularly clear example: when Pinnock rejects "such an infinite sentence," and goes on to ask whether a sinner could cause God an infinite loss, his objection applies not just to a sentence of everlasting torment, but to any infinite sentence, including extinction. This objection is something of a commonplace in the literature. Blanchard writes: "If it would be wrong of God to punish finite sin with everlasting punishment, how can it be right for him to punish it by annihilation, which by definition is itself everlasting?"³⁰⁹ Blomberg argues similarly: "the problem of infinite punishment for finite sin is not resolved by Annihilationism: those who would cease to exist would still do so for an infinite period of time."³¹⁰ Again, Grenz:

annihilationism does not truly assuage the problems which lead its proponents to reject the traditional view. Ceasing to exist for all eternity is as permanent a consequence as conscious suffering in hell. for this reason, the annihilation of the lost ought to be equally offensive to evangelical sensibilities about what constitutes just punishment for decisions made during earthly life.³¹¹

This response is effective against any annihilationist objection expressed in terms of the comparison between infinite punishment and finite sin. If this annihilationist objection is to be sustained then they must argue that it is not an infinite punishment per se which is unjust, but only a certain type of infinite punishment, that is unending torment. The most hopeful line of argument is probably from this-world analogies, and particularly human penal systems. Kvanvig offers some comments on human analogies from penal practice, but notes that these would suggest that Annihilationism is actually more severe than Traditionalism.

Nothing is to be gained in responding to objections to a penal theory by substituting metaphysical capital punishment for metaphysical life imprisonment; if anything capital punishment would suggest that the annihilationist view assigns a more severe punishment than does the strong view.³¹²

Again, "the annihilation view... in no sense involves a mitigation of the strong view."³¹³

However Kvanvig also makes an important qualification when he suggests that "the annihilation view has some privileged position with respect to a torture chamber image of

³⁰⁸ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

³¹⁰ Blomberg, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³¹¹ Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), p. 830.

³¹² Kvanvig, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

hell...³¹⁴ and this, he suggests, may be mitigated by extinction. The 'torture chamber image of hell' would include the classic understanding of Traditionalism. However, other writers have argued that even on the torture chamber image the damned would still prefer a tortured existence to extinction, and so 'the annihilation view' is still not a mitigation. Writers I have quoted above to this effect include Fudge: "... throughout human history men have willingly chosen the severest tortures... rather than face the final cutting off of their expected years of life."³¹⁵ This view has a long pedigree, and Bonda traces it back as far as the Neoplatonism of Augustine: "In Augustine's philosophy it is always better to exist than not to exist, even when the existence is unhappy."³¹⁶ Bonda quotes in evidence from *The City of God*:

Mere existence is desirable in virtue of a kind of natural property. So much so that even those who are wretched are for this very reason unwilling to die... If those wretches were offered immortality, on the condition that their misery would be undying, with the alternative that if they refused to live for ever in the same misery they would cease to have any existence at all, and would perish utterly, then they would certainly be overjoyed to choose perpetual misery in preference to complete annihilation.³¹⁷

Bray notes the same philosophical roots: "In the Platonic scheme of things, the continuing existence of rebellious souls is a lesser evil than their total destruction,..."³¹⁸ Bonda and Bray though seem to have very different assessments of this older view. Bonda writes, "This kind of philosophy is meaningless to us. We cannot believe that an endless existence of torture is preferable to non-existence."³¹⁹ For support he could have cited Aquinas, who draws a similar conclusion using an argument based on Aristotle. In an article entitled, "Whether the Damned by Right and Deliberate Reason Would Wish Not to Be?" Aquinas responds:

I answer that, Not to be may be considered in two ways. First, in itself, and thus it can nowise be desirable, since it has no aspect of good, but is pure deprivation of good. Secondly, it may be considered as a relief from a painful life or from some unhappiness: and thus *not to be* takes on the aspect of good, since *to lack*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³¹⁵ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 198. Fudge is talking about the present life but he uses it as an argument by analogy to the after-life.

³¹⁶ Bonda, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³¹⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, 11.27, quoted by Bonda, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³¹⁸ Bray, *art. cit.*, p. 22. This makes the first half of Shedd's observation quite wrong: "The guilty and remorseful have, in all ages, deemed the extinction of consciousness after death to be a blessing; but the advocate of conditional immortality explains it to be a curse..." Shedd, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

³¹⁹ Bonda, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

an evil is a kind of good as the philosopher says (*Ethic.* V. 1). In this way it is better for the damned not to be than to be unhappy.³²⁰

Bray, on the other hand, having compared extinction to euthanasia, concludes that,

One difficulty with this is that we do not accept euthanasia (i.e. deliberate 'mercy' killing, not suspension of treatment for the incurable) as a valid response to hopeless suffering here on earth, so why should we do so in the afterlife? However bad it may be, continuing existence is a better state than total annihilation, because it preserves the dignity of the individual person.³²¹

My own view agrees with Kvanvig that extinction is to be regarded as a mitigation of the classic traditionalist hell of the 'torture chamber'. However, I will argue in chapter three that the damned will want to remain alive, and that it is indeed a 'better state' than extinction because there is purpose in their justly suffering. It remains unclear though how bad the torment of the traditionalist hell would have to become before extinction becomes the preferable option. I suspect that analogies from this life are not close enough to provide a reliable basis for an argument where such fine distinctions are required.

This difficulty of using the analogy of capital punishment is compounded by the problem that O'Donovan notes in determining the penal severity of capital punishment in this life. "The conventional answer, that [capital punishment] is just a little more severe than being sentenced to prison for life, is highly controversial, for... one could argue with great persuasiveness either that it is immeasurably more severe or that it is immeasurably more lenient."³²² Later he writes of the "problem of the incommensurability of capital punishment with quantitatively calculated limits."³²³ This seems to reflect both the uncertainty and the variety of opinions about the conclusions to be drawn from the analogy with capital punishment in the literature on hell. In the light of this difficulty it seems that it would be unwise to rest much weight on an argument from the analogy from capital punishment. Further, if the first option is taken, that it is 'immeasurably more severe', then the annihilationist claim, that their position is more just because less severe than Traditionalism, is weakened even more: extinction would be *more* severe. If the second option is taken, that it is 'immeasurably more lenient', then this seems to result in the position I will argue for below: that it is merely a finite punishment. However, it is clear

³²⁰ Aquinas, *op. cit.*, Q. 98, Art. 3, Suppl., pp. 2991-2. [Italics original]. See also Q. 86, Art. 2, Suppl. reply Obj. 3., p. 2917.

³²¹ Bray, *art. cit.*, p. 23.

³²² Oliver O'Donovan, *Measure for Measure: Justice in Punishment and the Sentence of Death* [Grove Booklet on Ethics No. 19] (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1977), p. 19.

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

that the predominant view held by both traditionalists and annihilationists is that the severity of the traditionalist hell is great enough to make extinction a mitigation.

Second, annihilationists need to offer an argument for the justice of extinction if they continue to claim that it is an infinite punishment. This they fail to do, and it is hard to see how they could do having rejected the classic traditionalist argument that sin against God, who is an infinite being, deserves infinite punishment. There are a number of other arguments, besides what I have called the 'classic' argument, which traditionalists use to justify a traditional hell, but which are not obviously available to an annihilationist.³²⁴ The two chief alternatives I will note here are that the damned continue to sin in hell and thus deserve further punishment; and that the guilt of the damned cannot be satisfied by suffering and therefore always remains to be punished. However, both these arguments seem to be justifications for a continuation of torment, as Stott suspects when he writes, "I question whether 'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice, unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity."³²⁵ In Chapter Three I will also argue at length that the argument from the continuation from sin is to be rejected on other grounds. An alternative strategy is to retain the traditionalist argument for an infinite punishment, drop their argument against the injustice of Traditionalism based on the rejection of this principle, and simply argue that the nature of the infinite punishment cannot be determined on the basis of this argument from justice alone.

Third, if extinction is an infinite punishment, there is the problem of justifying a finite period of torment preceding it. This problem has been noted by several annihilationists. Fudge discusses the issue, and quotes Jonathan Edwards, as I noted above, to argue that extinction is "as properly eternal and scripturally horrible" as Traditionalism. However, if extinction is as scripturally horrible, then there would seem to be no need for a separate period of torment as well. This is precisely the point that Edwards goes on to make. Fudge records Edwards' argument, but fails to make any response to it.

If "eternal punishment" does not consist of conscious unending torment but rather extinction forever, then it is as fully "eternal" with or *without* the preceding penal

³²⁴ The most extensive range of alternative justifications of endless punishment is discussed by Shedd in his third chapter entitled "The Rational Argument" *op. cit.*, pp. 118-170.

³²⁵ Stott, *Essentials*, p. 319.

pains, he says. And therefore "it answers the scriptural expressions as well, to suppose that they shall be annihilated immediately, without any long pains, provided the annihilation be everlasting."³²⁶³²⁷

The implication of this point is that Annihilationism can collapse into the position of the Jehovah's Witnesses, with extinction at the first death. The fact that Fudge notes that "[Edwards] is arguing *ad hominem* in response to those who insisted on a very, very lengthy period of pain which would be followed by extinction,"³²⁸ does not effect the logic of the point. However Guillebaud argues that a period of torment allows for different degrees of punishment in hell. He asks the question that if the damned are to be punished with extinction, "Then why torment them first?"³²⁹ After offering some qualifications to the human penal analogy, since God is not exactly like a human judge, Guillebaud emphasises the issue of degrees: "If the penalty for the vilest wickedness were a painless extinction of existence, many of the worst inequalities of earth would go eternally unredressed."³³⁰ Later he adds, "the fact of gradation of punishment, which would be impossible if there were no penal suffering, gives room for a perfect administration of justice."³³¹ However, it remains difficult to see why the difference in degrees of torment doesn't become insignificant alongside an 'infinite' punishment whose consequences are eternal. Annihilationists could of course respond that although the period of torment and the doctrine of degrees that follow from it may seem insignificant, because they are merely finite alongside an infinite punishment, they are not thereby shown to be necessarily wrong.

I suspect that for many annihilationists, although the infinite penal nature of extinction is formally upheld, the focus of comparison tends to shift to the common element of the two views, that is the comparative lengths of torment, one finite, the other infinite. This might explain Wenham's reference above to 'an *infinite* difference' between the two hells and Constable's analogy above of a comparison between time and eternity. If there is a tendency to overlook the penal nature of extinction at points in the argument this may be because it offers a much clearer mitigation, and may result from an unacknowledged sense that extinction is actually a finite punishment. Thus, in much annihilationist writing there

³²⁶ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 515-525; quotation on p. 524. [Italics mine].

³²⁷ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

³²⁹ Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

is a tension on the issue of the severity of the punishment: there is a rejection of the classic traditionalist view as being unjustly severe, and yet at the same time annihilationists have emphasised the horror of extinction in part to avoid the charge from traditionalists, considered by Wenham, that "conditionalism devalues the terror of the biblical deterrent."³³²

In conclusion, annihilationists have not always formulated their arguments about justice clearly. In particular they need to clarify that their argument is not against an infinite punishment per se, but against the severity of the infinite punishment of Traditionalism, if they are not to be self-refuting. However, once it has been admitted that both sorts of hell are infinite punishments, I don't think the objection that classic Traditionalism is too severe can be easily established from an argument about justice. If there is a ground for such an objection it probably lies in the area of analogies from this life, although these would require careful formulation, and would probably not be decisive. The problems that annihilationists face in justifying a limited period of torment before extinction do not seem to be decisive either. However there is a widely held opinion that extinction is less severe a punishment than the endless torment of Traditionalism which is usually portrayed in a way close to Kvanvig's torture chamber view. I think that this claim may be valid. In the final section of this chapter, I therefore hope to formulate a modified Traditionalism which may go some way to meeting the objection of annihilationists who believe that the usual traditionalist hell is too severe.

2.2.2 If Extinction is a Finite Punishment

In this section I want to argue that extinction is neither an infinite punishment, nor no punishment at all as some traditionalists have argued, but a finite one. I want to suggest that such a position has to its own problems, which should lead to its rejection, unless Annihilationism can be modified to meet them. Finally, I will suggest that a modified form of Traditionalism can also be understood as a finite punishment, but with fewer problems than a modified Annihilationism. I will begin by noting and refuting the views that extinction is either an infinite punishment or no punishment at all, before making my own case that extinction is actually a finite punishment.

³³² Wenham, *Goodness*, p. 37, where he considers this argument.

I want to begin by arguing that extinction is not an infinite punishment. First, extinction is not an infinite punishment because it is not an infinite loss. A loss is only a punishment if it is a loss of something held by right. Thus, for example, the loss of winning the National Lottery is not a punishment, but the loss of my freedom is. It is doubtful whether the damned have been deprived of an infinite bliss to which they otherwise have a right, and if this is so then the argument is refuted. However, second, even if it is decided that this is an infinite loss, then for loss to be a just retributive punishment the damned must be able to *fully* comprehend, and thus in some sense experience, the infinite extent of the loss, or the severity of the punishment is unrelated to the experience of the one punished. However both options are to be rejected, because for a punishment to be retributive it must be experienced, but extinction can only be experienced in prospect, and this cannot be a complete apprehension of it in its infinite extent. Therefore annihilationists actually face the difficulties of a hell of finite punishment, which I will note below.

The second view of the penal nature of extinction taken by some traditionalists is that it is no punishment at all. Fudge notes that Traditionalists "sometimes object that irreversible (therefore endless) extinction is actually no 'punishment' at all."³³³ Tidball notes it as the first objection raised against Annihilationism: "Many [traditionalists] have to be persuaded that annihilation is punishment, since it makes hell out simply to be a state of non-existence."³³⁴ The argument is usually that punishment needs to be experienced and that by this criterion extinction is not a punishment. An example of a traditionalist who makes this criticism, with great repetitiveness, is John Gerstner. For example, "Extinction is no punishment at all because it leaves no one to suffer any punishment."³³⁵ Essential to Gerstner's understanding is the assumption that punishment involves suffering. "I must keep repeating that annihilation is an alternative to or a substitute for pain, not a form of it." Gerstner is an Edwards scholar, and his own view follows that of Edwards. To give a single quote of Edwards from many possible ones,

... a state of annihilation is no state of suffering at all... They no more suffer to eternity than they did suffer from eternity... It is agreeable both to Scripture and

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 198. Gray imagines that an annihilationist might also want to use this argument to avoid the problems of extinction being an infinite punishment. He rejects the argument because it "is to ignore the effects of that action [of extinction]." Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 237 [Italics original].

³³⁴ Tidball, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

³³⁵ Gerstner, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

reason to suppose, that the wicked will be punished in such a manner that they shall be sensible of the punishment they are under.³³⁶

A similar argument is made by Shedd, who argued that "the extinction of consciousness is not of the nature of punishment. The essence of punishment is suffering, and suffering is consciousness."³³⁷ Another example of this argument in the recent debate is from Gomes, who states that

once we have said the word 'punishment we have also said, at least by implication, the word 'conscious.' Punishment, per se, is conscious or it is not a punishment. A punishment that is not felt is not a punishment." He continues, "Someone cannot be punished eternally unless that someone is there to receive the punishment. One can exist and not be punished, but one cannot be punished and not exist. Nonentities cannot receive punishment."³³⁸

Again, Grudem states, "... it may be wondered whether... immediate annihilation can really be called a punishment, since there would be no consciousness of pain."³³⁹ Support may be drawn for this point from Moberly's book *The Ethics of Punishment*. The book, which is rarely quoted in the debate, has a final chapter entitled 'The Conception of Eternal Punishment' in which he makes this point, although his own position is different to that of both Traditionalism and Annihilationism. Moberly suggests that without suffering there is no punishment:

How then must we thing [sic] of 'Hell', i.e. the ultimate condition of lost souls, if we are to think of it at all? Not as a condition of perpetual, deserved and conscious, suffering, but as one of imbecility deepening into personal nonentity... *there would be no suffering, for there would be no consciousness left to suffer... Hell then would not be a state of punishment.*³⁴⁰

I think that this is correct: first, the obvious point that once the damned are extinguished they no longer suffer; and, second, that retributive punishment needs to be experienced by the one being punished.

However it is wrong to conclude that extinction is not a punishment at all. Rather extinction is a punishment but not an infinite one. An annihilationist would be correct in using the analogy of execution to argue that extinction can reasonably be viewed as a punishment. However I think that the traditionalist argument above is also correct: that

³³⁶ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 84, col. 2.

³³⁷ W.G.T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (orig. 1885; rpt. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1990), p. 92.

³³⁸ Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell, Part Two," in *Christian Research Journal* (Summer 1991), p. 11, quoted in Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

³³⁹ Grudem, *op. cit.*, p. 1150.

³⁴⁰ Walter Moberly, *The Ethics of Punishment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 349-350. [Italics mine]. I will examine Moberly's position further in the following chapter.

retributive punishment needs to be experienced by the one punished, and thus after the moment of extinction punishment ceases for that person since they cannot experience it. The resolution of these two statements comes, I believe, in the observation that the damned may be able to contemplate their coming extinction, in a way analogous to that in which a criminal could contemplate his execution in this life. In this case they would be able to comprehend, though only partially, the future loss, and so in some sense experience it in the present, thus meeting the criteria for retributive punishment to be experienced. However I do not see how they could experience it as an infinite punishment in the present, since a finite mind could not fully grasp the prospect of an infinite future, and thus not experience an infinite loss. Edwards has a brief discussion of the issue, from a traditionalist perspective, and concludes that even though the damned may have their understanding enlarged, they still could not fully comprehend an infinite period of time:

If it were possible for the damned in hell to have a comprehensive knowledge of eternity, their sorrow and grief would be infinite in degree. The comprehensive view of so much sorrow, which they must endure, would cause infinite grief for the present. *Though they will not have a comprehensive knowledge of it*, yet they will doubtless have a vastly more lively and strong apprehension of it than we can have in this world... their capacity will probably be enlarged, their understandings will be quicker and stronger in a future state; and God can give them as great a sense and as strong an impression of eternity, as he pleases, to increase their grief and torment.³⁴¹

Several annihilationists themselves argue this in the case of the death of Christ, which I will examine further in chapter four. They argue that Christ could not have known what it was like to face, and thus in some sense experience, an infinitely long period of torment, in a finite period. In other words, the imagination is not able to take in an infinite loss, and thus although the damned in an annihilationist hell would indeed experience extinction as a punishment, it could not be as an infinite punishment. Further, the notion that extinction is only a punishment to the extent that it is perceived and thus experienced beforehand, would seem to gain support from another annihilationist argument. Annihilationists argue that the first death is not an adequate punishment in itself. However by their criteria of loss it would seem to be as much an infinite punishment as extinction at the second death. Presumably they need to argue for the second death, with respect to this point, because the damned are not adequately aware of their loss and its retributive nature at the first death.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 88. [Italics mine].

³⁴² In this chapter I am focusing on the requirement for punishment to be suffered or experienced to be punishment; in the following chapter, in a section on the lucidity of the damned, I will use a similar argument

Therefore I conclude, against several traditionalists, that extinction *is* a punishment. I would also conclude, against the explicit statements of annihilationists, that it is not an infinite punishment because there is no infinite experience involved. This means that the punishment of an annihilationist hell is finite, a point which I now assess. An obvious advantage of the position that extinction is a finite punishment is that it avoids the self-refuting nature of the annihilationist charge against Traditionalism that an infinite punishment is unjust for sin committed in this life. However there are also several possible criticisms.

First, a number of traditionalists in the recent debate have argued that if annihilation is a finite punishment then it can be completed, and after its completion the damned should be translated to Heaven. Thus a finite hell becomes a form of purgatory since the damned should be translated to heaven at their end of their punishment. What is surprising about this argument as it is presented is that it rests on an assumption, that no annihilationist holds, that extinction is not a further punishment, but simply the end point of the punishment. However if extinction is a finite punishment it means that the total punishment of hell, including both torment and extinction, is finite and therefore the punishment could still be completed. I will therefore note one of several examples of this argument in the literature. Carson writes, "One might reasonably wonder why, if people pay for their sins in hell before they are annihilated, they cannot be released into heaven, turning hell into purgatory. Alternatively, if the sins have not yet been paid for, why should they be annihilated?"³⁴³ I think that the principle here is sound that if the penalty for sin can be completed by the suffering of the damned, then they should be translated to heaven. I also think that the traditionalist argument is sound for an annihilationist hell where the only penal element is the torment. If this were the case then Annihilationism

to argue further that for a punishment to be a just punishment it needs not only to be *suffered* or experienced as punishment but it must also be perceived as *just*.

³⁴³ Carson, *Gagging*, p. 530. See also, for example, Grudem, *op. cit.*, p. 1151; Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 223; and Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 33. In conversation, Kendall Harmon has aptly described the annihilationist position as "Purgatory in reverse," in other words a period of fixed suffering to pay for earthly sins, but followed by destruction rather than the beatific vision. However, a formal comparison with the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory falls down chiefly because evangelicals are not arguing that the damned have had the guilt of sin removed, leaving only any punishment for sin. So, for example, Vatican II says, "The doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or cleansed... after death with punishments designed to purge

would collapse into Universalism, which has almost always been rejected as an option by evangelicals.³⁴⁴ However I don't think that this argument can be extended to cover the finite punishment of extinction so that as soon as the damned are extinguished they would have completed their punishment, and thus deserve to be re-created and translated to heaven. One of the problems here is that in order for extinction to be more than a very light punishment, the damned would have to believe that it would be a permanent state rather than a momentary cessation of existence. However, if the damned are to believe that extinction is irreversible it would involve a deception, which is hard to reconcile with a divine punishment. Further if the damned are required to know that their punishment is just, as I will argue in the next chapter, they would also presumably be capable of this logic and conclude that they would have to be re-created if God wasn't to be unjustly severe. Therefore I think that an annihilationist could respond to this criticism by arguing that the annihilationist hell is a finite punishment but with permanent consequences. Thus, although the argument about a collapse into purgatory is effective against any finite punishment without permanent consequences, such a revised position avoids it. Indeed the permanent consequence in this case is extinction which necessarily rules out any subsequent translation to heaven.

Second, a common traditionalist charge against any position which fails to maintain an infinite punishment for sin is that it fails to serve as a deterrent to sin or as an adequate motive to evangelism and conversion. An example of this argument with respect to evangelism is given by Packer, already noted in chapter one, although he frames it in terms not of infinite and finite, but of the greatest punishment in distinction to anything less. Packer writes that the annihilationist "will miss out on telling the unconverted that their prospects without Christ are as bad as they possibly could be... Conditionalism, logically thought through, cannot but impoverish a Christian man, and limit his usefulness to the Lord."³⁴⁵ A strong response though can be made by arguing that the periods of both torment and extinction are fearful enough to serve these ends. Indeed Wenham offers the interesting counter-claim that Annihilationism is actually a better deterrent because it is

away their debts." [*Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Austin P. Flannery (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) p. 64.]

³⁴⁴ "Today, universalism remains a largely non-evangelical view, although there are signs that it has begun to have some influence on the more radical wing of evangelicalism." ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 27. For more details see the survey, pp. 24-34.

³⁴⁵ Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

more believable.³⁴⁶ Wenham makes a direct response to Packer's argument when he observes that "I have no reason to think that the adoption of conditionalism impairs a man's evangelism."³⁴⁷

Third, any annihilationist who wants to argue that hell is a finite punishment needs to show that the traditionalist argument for sin deserving an infinite punishment is unfounded. I will examine this in the next section.

In conclusion, in this chapter so far I have sought to show that the annihilationist argument against the justice of a traditionalist hell as they state it, without qualification, is self-refuting if they hold that extinction is an infinite punishment. While they could refine their argument and hold not that an infinite punishment per se is unjust, but the particular type of infinite punishment held by traditionalists is unjust, they do not argue this, and it is hard to see how they could justify such a nuanced distinction on the basis of an argument from justice alone. However, I have argued that in fact extinction is a finite punishment. I have then argued that any form of finite hell may collapse into a form of purgatory, unless it is a finite punishment but with permanent consequences.

2.2.3 The Possible Justice of an Infinite Punishment

I now turn to assess the annihilationist criticisms of the classic traditionalist justification for an unending hell. The issue that arises for annihilationists with respect to this argument is that if, as I argued above, extinction is a finite punishment then an annihilationist will need to show that the traditionalist argument for sin deserving an infinite punishment is unfounded. I will argue that there is some validity to the classic traditionalist argument, and that if this is accepted then Annihilationism is found to be an unjustly lenient punishment.

I will begin by expounding more fully what I have called the classical traditionalist argument to justify an eternity of torment for sin committed in this life.³⁴⁸ It may be

³⁴⁶ Wenham, *Goodness*, p. 37, n. 7.

³⁴⁷ Wenham, *Facing*, p. 250.

summarised as follows: in sinning against an infinite Being we deserve an infinite punishment, yet since in Hell the damned can only suffer as finite beings their punishment must therefore be infinite in duration. One of the most important versions of this argument historically is from Anselm who argued that the degree of guilt entailed by sin depended upon the dignity of the person offended, so sin against an infinite God demands infinite punishment because of the infinite guilt entailed.³⁴⁹ A later example of this argument is given by Aquinas.

Further, the magnitude of the punishment matches the magnitude of the sin... Now a sin that is against God is infinite; the higher the person against whom it is committed, the graver the sin - it is more criminal to strike a head of state than private citizen - and God is of infinite greatness. Therefore an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed against him.³⁵⁰

However, this view that the gravity of sin is defined by its object isn't simply due to Anselm's feudal model of relationships. For other presentations of the same point from later, non-feudal, periods, one could turn to Jonathan Edwards³⁵¹ from the eighteenth century. From the nineteenth century Shedd notes: "The doctrine that sin is an infinite evil and involves infinite guilt, because of its objective reference to an infinite Being, is one of the commonplaces of theology."³⁵² From the twentieth century Peterson comments succinctly on this point: "Aquinas is right,"³⁵³ and Paul Helm argues: "Hell is without limit because the offence justly punished is committed against one of infinite, immeasurable holiness and goodness."³⁵⁴ A final recent example is from Carson, who quotes John Piper: "The essential thing is that degrees of blameworthiness come not from how long you offend dignity, but from how high the dignity is that you offend."³⁵⁵

However annihilationists reject these arguments. Thus Pinnock claims that, "We do not accept inequality in judgments on the basis of the honor of the victim, as if stealing from a doctor is worse than stealing from a beggar... No judge today would calibrate the degree

³⁴⁸ D.P. Walker refers to this justification as "The usual way of doing this,..." in the tradition. [*The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 43.]

³⁴⁹ This principle is found in Anselm's discussion in *Cur Deus Homo*, Book I, chapter 21.

³⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 1a2ae.87,4. Also *Summa Theologiae* Suppl.99.1 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3:140-146

³⁵¹ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p.669; vol. 2, p. 83; pp. 251-2.

³⁵² Shedd, *op. cit.*, p.152, n. 48.

³⁵³ Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

³⁵⁴ Helm, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

³⁵⁵ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), p. 127, quoted by Carson, *Gagging*, p. 534, n. 52.

of punishment on a scale of the honour of the one who has been wronged."³⁵⁶ However judges do determine punishments according to the person wronged, even if not necessarily according to their honour as defined by Anselm, because people are not just private individuals but representative persons. Thus my killing the Queen would receive a greater punishment than my killing my brother, because the Queen is head of state and thus her murder is also an assault upon the state. By extension, it could be argued that if to rebel against God is in effect to desire the death of God, this is to assault all that is good of which God is the source. Thus it is the most serious crime I could possibly commit, and thus is worthy of the most serious penalty. Since God is in some sense infinite, it could be argued that sin against God in some sense deserves infinite punishment by the retributive principle of the *lex talionis*.

I will also note some other arguments against the classic justification. Miley was a traditionalist and an Arminian from the nineteenth century, and he rejects the classical traditionalist argument, yet he believes in a traditionalist hell on the basis of revelation alone, holding that reason is unable to adjudicate upon the question of justice. He makes two points to support this conclusion, which serve as criticisms of the classical justification. First,

If the principle be true, seemingly, it must equalise all sins, which is neither rational nor scriptural."³⁵⁷ Second, "we may posit another principle: Sin is the deed of a finite being, and therefore can have only finite demerit. And who shall say that the former is any clearer than the latter? In truth, neither has any solution in our reason."³⁵⁸

However I think that Aquinas has offered an articulation of the classic traditionalist position which takes both of these points into account. First, there are degrees of punishment in the intensity of the torment, although not the length of hell. Second, Aquinas incorporates both the finite sinner and the infinite object of sin in his formulation, so that the damned are punished in finite intensity but for infinite duration. Walker explains the point,

Thomas' own justification of eternal torment is more subtle and satisfactory. Since the torments of hell are infinite in duration but finite in intensity (though much more intense than any pain in this life), the sin must be both infinite and finite;

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³⁵⁷ J. Miley, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989 [1893]), p. 468.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

infinite in that it is turning away from God, but finite in that it is turning toward a creature.³⁵⁹

It is hard to adjudicate on the validity of these arguments, but in theory they do offer a response to the criticisms.

Further, it could be argued that since an infinite period of punishment can never be completed, it follows that the punishment is necessarily incomplete and justice could never be fully done. On this view hell would be necessarily unjust on the 'classical' traditionalist understanding. However it could be responded that so long as the sentence is fully just, then the fact that it can never, of necessity, be completed is not a reason for holding it to be unjust.

Some writers seem to simply side-step the whole question. Blocher concludes:

We shall excuse ourselves of all calculus of infinities, and hide behind a quotation from Charles Hodge... 'Men are apt to involve themselves in contradictions when they attempt to reason about the infinite. The word is so vague and so comprehensive, and our ideas of what it is intended to express are so inadequate, that we are soon lost when we seek to make it a guide in forming our judgements.'³⁶⁰

Fudge made similar comments on the calculation of infinities, which I quoted above. However, while there are major difficulties in relating different uses of the term 'infinite' and then in equating them with a temporal duration, there needs to be *some* valid link since the unending hell of classic Traditionalism and the infinite punishment of extinction do indeed continue for an infinite period and thus, on almost any theory of retribution, to be just, the sin must in some sense be an infinite demerit. If it is not infinite, then the only alternative is that sin is only finitely grave. In this case one needs to establish what the alternative positions are to the 'classical' argument that unending hell is the just punishment for sins committed in this life, because sin is infinitely grave.

In conclusion, it seems to me that there is some plausibility to the argument that sin against God is in some sense an infinite demerit and thus deserving of infinite punishment. If this is the case, and extinction is a finite punishment, then Annihilationism is shown to be unjustly lenient. However, this still leaves open the question of what severity of infinite punishment is justified. I am not sure that from the criteria of justice alone it is possible to

³⁵⁹ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

adjudicate between different sorts of hell of infinite punishment. As I have shown, most annihilationists view their hell as both infinite and a mitigation of the traditionalist one. Even though I have argued that they are wrong to believe that it is an infinite punishment, nonetheless they think that it is. Therefore if I can offer a modified Traditionalism which is also a mitigation of its severity, it may serve to remove one of the major annihilationist objections to Traditionalism. To this I turn below, and the modified Traditionalism of Henri Blocher. However I argue that it can also be interpreted as a finite punishment. Therefore if the classic traditionalist argument for the justice of an infinite punishment is rejected, and no alternative found, then Blocher's position also offers a traditionalist alternative to the Annihilationism of finite punishment.

2.3 A Modified Traditionalism: The Damned are in a State of Fixity

William Crockett writes, with reference to Clark Pinnock, "He says... that the doctrine of everlasting punishment has caused great anxiety in the Christian world (certainly true) and may be about to disappear unless a better interpretation can be offered about its nature (probably true)."³⁶¹ As I have shown, one such alternative interpretation which is claimed to be better by its proponents is Annihilationism, but their argument about justice is not as strong as they believe. Are there then any other 'better interpretations' available to evangelicals? I want to argue that there is one, and to develop some suggestions made by Henri Blocher.³⁶² Indeed Blocher offers his thesis as a modification of the traditional position, writing at the beginning of his paper: "It is possible, we suggest, to reach such a renewed understanding of the old dogma that will relieve some of the tension..."³⁶³ In the

³⁶⁰ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 878, quoted by Blocher, *op. cit.*, p.299.

³⁶¹ Crockett, *Four Views*, p: 171.

³⁶² Henri Blocher, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Faculté Libre de Théologie Évangélique in Vaux-sur-Seine, France. Blocher first wrote about his position in "La doctrine du châtement éternel," in *Ichthus* 32 (April 1973), pp. 3-9. A brief account was also given in "The Scope of Redemption and Modern Theology," in *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, p. 103. His major presentation of his thesis is in a paper delivered at the Rutherford House Conference in Christian Dogmatics, entitled "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil," and published in *Universalism and the Doctrine of God*, ed. N.M. de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992). [All references to Blocher are from this essay unless otherwise stated.] There has been almost no interaction with Blocher's essay: The only references to Blocher's thesis I have found outside of reviews are three pages in Bonda, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-228), and less than a page in both Carson (*Gagging*, p. 534) and Wenham (*Facing*, p. 258).

³⁶³ Blocher, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-5, [Italics original]. At the very end of his essay Blocher re-caps this point: "Regarding the everlasting punishment, our effort aims only at keeping within the bounds of the revealed truth, but *without* reading into the text misconceptions that cause many to stumble." [*Ibid.*, p. 312. Italics original.]

rest of this chapter I want to examine only one element of Blocher's modified Traditionalism, that the damned do not experience an unending succession of moments but are instead in what Blocher describes as a state of "fixity." Blocher does not divide his thesis, having a continuous exposition of his position, but I think that this element stands independently from the rest and can thus be studied in isolation.³⁶⁴ I will examine this element of Blocher's thesis at some length because I think that it has two advantages over the classic traditionalist position. First, it offers a mitigation of the severity of the torment of the classic traditionalist hell because the subjective experience of the damned is limited in certain respects. This mitigation serves at least to lessen the basic annihilationist objection about the injustice of excessive severity. Second, this position can be interpreted as a traditionalist hell which only requires sin to be finitely serious as justification. Therefore if the arguments for the infinite seriousness of sin committed in this life are not persuasive, it is still possible to maintain a form of Traditionalism.

In turning to exposition, Blocher's portrayal of the nature of hell at this point turns on his understanding of the Biblical concept of eternal death. He writes:

The Biblical idea of death does not involve non-existence, but, indeed, the *loss of life*. Life is ability to act and to project, life is sharing in exchanges; total death is isolation, paralysis (no *facultas* left, to recall the Augustinian word), non-renewal, that is *fixity*, absolute fixity... What remains is the *corpse* of a sinful life together with the lucid consciousness of that truth - abhorrence - and no ground whatsoever for any change of that final situation.³⁶⁵

Blocher then draws on other writers to illuminate the meaning of 'eternal death':

Somewhat intriguingly, we may borrow phrases or sentences from writers whose global doctrine we criticized, to illustrate the meaning of 'eternal death'. Karl Rahner argues from the power of freedom to set something definitive: 'because "eternity" is not the temporal continuation, beyond, of the history of freedom, but the accomplished definitiveness of history, hell is "eternal", and, so, the manifestation of God's righteousness.'³⁶⁶ Rahner probably plays with a sophisticated idea of eternity, a purely a-temporal eternity, which we would not

³⁶⁴ In the next chapter I will examine the other elements of Blocher's modified Traditionalism, which I will argue offers a better way of avoiding the problem of eternal evil, or dualism. My own view is that this element of fixity is more speculative than the other elements and that it could be rejected without requiring the rejection of the others.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

³⁶⁶ This is Blocher's own translation of Rahner's study s.v. 'Hoelle,' in *Sacramentum Mundi. Theologisches Lexikon für die Praxis* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), II, col. 738. This passage can also be found translated in the English edition, *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*. Edited by Karl Rahner (E.T. London: Burns and Oates, 1975), p.604.

p. 604.]

consider adequate.³⁶⁷ It is not adequate for eternal life, but it could approximately suit eternal *death*, the endless duration of which is equivalent to a *nunc aeternum*.³⁶⁸

I would also note Rahner's essay "Ideas For a Theology of Death," where he describes the state after death as being "frozen," which sounds similar to Blocher's notion of fixity.

Life 'after death'... is something radically withdrawn from the former temporal dimension and the former spatially conceived time, and a state of final and definitive completion and immediacy to God which is absolutely disparate from time and space, and is the end-point of a life lived once and for all in freedom precisely here, the end-point of that personal history which is brought to its completion in itself... someone might object that it would, after all, be terrible if our former life, with all its banalities and questionable aspects were itself frozen in a final and definitive state.³⁶⁹

Rahner goes on to deny not that the state is frozen, but that it is banalities rather than love which the state consists of. He is here talking of heaven but, as Blocher has done, it could be transferred to hell: a terrible freezing of our earthly life in a final state. Blocher himself then goes on to make a similar point from Barth: "We could similarly compare Karl Barth's view on man in the final state: his emphasis is that man shall exist eschatologically *as past*, 'one day he will only have been.'³⁷⁰ But this, in our proposal, would apply only to the lost."³⁷¹

There are also a number of similarities between Rahner's view of eternity and those of Aquinas, and another Roman Catholic theologian: von Balthasar. Sachs offers the following description of von Balthasar's position. "Balthasar... speaks of hell as everlasting, never-ending duration, "complete withdrawal to the point of shrivelling into a disconsolate immovable now," which is utterly absent of opportunity, future, and desire."³⁷² In an article on von Balthasar's doctrine of hell, Flannery draws out a distinction with Aquinas.

Balthasar does not directly contradict the proposition that for these souls hell is eternal. He attempts to maintain the doctrine, while offering a special

³⁶⁷ See various contributions in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed., *The Power and Weakness of God: Impassability and Orthodoxy* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), including our 'Divine Immutability', p. 9 on eternity.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 309, quoting Karl Rahner, s.v. 'Hoelle' in *op. cit.*, vol. 2, col. 738.

³⁶⁹ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 13, (E.T. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), p. 174.

³⁷⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, ed., trans. Harold Knight et. al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), p. 632.

³⁷¹ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

³⁷² Sachs, *art. cit.*, p. 248, n. 92. The quote is from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men be Saved"?: with A Short Discourse on Hell and Apokatastasis: Universal Reconciliation* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), p. 133.

understanding of what 'eternity' might mean, with regard to hell. There is nothing novel in this per se: Thomas Aquinas, for instance, says quite flatly that in hell there is no 'true eternity' but rather 'interminability'.³⁷³ Thomas's intention is not to mitigate the reality of hell; if anything, it is to acknowledge a worse prospect for sinners than eternity, which he views quite favourably since it is so bound up with beatitude. Balthasar's intention is quite the opposite. In accord with Thomas, he makes the point that 'the eternity in eternal life' is an enhancement of life, but then he says that the eternity of eternal death 'is complete withdrawal to the point of shrivelling into a disconsolate immovable now... where nothing more can be contemplated or done'.³⁷⁴

Thus Blocher suggests a view of hell which turns on its head the traditional view, for example, of Aquinas. For Aquinas the blessed experience an a-temporal eternity while the damned experience endless time. More precisely, Aquinas argues that true eternity, which entails immutability, belongs only to God, but through the beatific vision the blessed participate in this and can therefore properly be said to enjoy eternal life. In hell there is a succession of torments in a succession that has no end. For Blocher it is the damned who experience something akin to an a-temporal eternity, although without the connotations of blessedness.

Blocher himself also notes that his position is similar to elements of C.S. Lewis' thought. Lewis writes, in passages not quoted by Blocher, that the lost soul "is eternally fixed in its diabolical attitude" and continues that we cannot be certain "whether this eternal fixity implies endless duration - or duration at all."³⁷⁵ A key difference though is that for Blocher the damned's attitude is not diabolical. I would also note the similarity here to Lewis' understanding of the biblical imagery. "But I notice that Our Lord, while stressing the terror of hell with unsparing severity usually emphasises the idea not of duration but of *finality*. Consignment to the destroying fire is usually treated as the end of the story - not as the beginning of a new story..."³⁷⁶

These features also raise the question as to whether Blocher's position is best thought of as variant of Traditionalism or Annihilationism. There is some evidence that he is best

³⁷³ Aquinas, *op. cit.*, I,q.10,a.3,ad 3; see also IV Sent. 49,q.1,a.2 solutio 3,ad 4.

³⁷⁴ K.L. Flannery, "How To Think About Hell," in *New Blackfriars* (Nov. 1991), p. 475, quoting from H. von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1988), p. 133. Flannery goes on to argue that Balthasar holds to the impossibility of eternal damnation, and thus "He must then mean that the shrinking of hell to a 'disconsolate immovable now' somehow forces the souls out." [Flannery, *op. cit.*, p. 476].

³⁷⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Orig., 1940; rpt, London : Fountain Books, 1977), p. 115.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

understood as an annihilationist, but I will argue that he is best understood as a traditionalist.³⁷⁷ Blocher quotes Lewis' words on 'destruction' with qualified approval, which could suggest that he is closer to a form of Annihilationism. "If soul [sic] can be destroyed, must there not be a state of having been a human soul? And is not that, perhaps, the state which is equally well described as torment, destruction and privation? (...) What is cast (or, casts itself) into hell is not a man: it is "remains".³⁷⁸ However, there is also disagreement over whether Lewis himself was best thought of as an annihilationist or a traditionalist, but Blocher seems to lie more to the annihilationist side of Lewis, when he concludes "Lewis, then, deviates, and he interprets these words [particularly "destruction"] in terms of maximum sinfulness. We would say: what is cast into hell is not the man *living*, but the man *dead*."³⁷⁹ Again, Blocher's language of "corpses"³⁸⁰ in hell, may suggest this conclusion. Kvanvig raises a very similar question about C.S. Lewis' position, as to whether it actually becomes a form of Annihilationism.

Yet, if hell does not involve "duration," if it is "in no sense parallel to heaven," but instead is "the outer rim where being fades away into nonentity," the most natural view of hell to hold is that it is a metaphorical description of what becomes of a person whom God annihilates. Lewis, however, balks at this conclusion... Nonetheless, his language is strongly suggestive of that view, and it is not clear how to reinterpret his language so that the annihilation view can be avoided and yet his claims constitute a response to the objection he is considering.³⁸¹

I think that Blocher's position does come close at points to a form of Annihilationism. However there are other aspects of Blocher's position which do not fit with annihilation and Blocher is explicit in his rejection of the position. Before proposing his own position, Blocher reviews current alternative apologies for hell and offers what he calls a "tentative appraisal." Here he both affirms Traditionalism and rejects Annihilationism concluding: "Annihilationist arguments... come short of the proof needed."³⁸² It is also clear that the damned are mentally lucid since they now see their sin for what it truly is.³⁸³ Therefore, I believe that Blocher's position is best thought of as a form of Traditionalism.

This is a difficult position to understand because, as Blocher notes, such a state is impossible to imagine: "We are utterly unable to *imagine* the experience of absolute fixity,

³⁷⁷ Harmon discusses Lewis' position in chapter three of his thesis, *Finally Excluded*.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113, quoted in Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

³⁷⁹ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

³⁸¹ Kvanvig, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

³⁸² Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

the 'feeling' of the remorse-consciousness eternalised. As long as we enjoy a measure of life, duration equals renewal."³⁸⁴ However, one area requiring clarification is whether Blocher is arguing for a temporal or an a-temporal hell. He only touches briefly on the topic, when he writes of "a purely a-temporal eternity... [which] could approximately suit... the endless duration which is equivalent to a *nunc aeternum*."³⁸⁵ Thus I think that Blocher conceives of the damned as being *in* time, since there is an endless duration, although its static nature means that it is in some sense "equivalent to" such an a-temporal hell. The sense of "equivalent to" here is not clear: it may be from the perception of the damned themselves, or it may be that both describe a state in which there are no changes. If this fixed state must be experienced in time, then it may be that the damned experience it subjectively as a finite period of time, although objectively it is never ending. A partial analogy may be some distressed mental states in which a scene or incident is replayed over and over again in the mind, thus approximating to a subjectively brief experience continued over a lengthy period of time. In the case of hell, this finite experience is continued over an infinite period of time.³⁸⁶

In turning to an assessment of this position, I would note again Blocher's acknowledgement that assessment is difficult. However there are problems in Blocher's conception of hell as a place of 'absolute fixity'. In particular there is a problem as to whether one can experience anything in a state of 'fixity'. Certainly if suffering implies change then this would have to occur within time. This was one of the key objections to the notion of the passibility of God, which is that for God to be passible he must change, and since he is perfect change could only be for the worse.³⁸⁷ While I could draw on arguments from the extensive tradition for an a-temporal after-life and apply it to the damned rather the righteous, Blocher holds that it is temporal. A solution may be that hell

³⁸³ I will explore Blocher's understanding of the lucidity of the damned in hell in the following chapter.

³⁸⁴ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

³⁸⁶ There are also similarities to the argument of Swinburne in *The Christian God*. There are two related points that he makes which could be used to support the notion of a finite experience in infinite time. First, Swinburne argues for the possibility of time having a topology but not a metric. [Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 80, n. 15.] Second he argues that God is in time, but that if there is a qualitatively consistent act, and no laws of nature, then there would be no difference between a finite and an infinite period of time. [*Ibid.*, p. 141.] It might be that the damned's experience of time could also be considered to lack a metric, and be a single consistent act, in this case remorse, and there would be no difference between an infinite and a finite length of time.

³⁸⁷ See R.J. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help": Divine Passibility in Modern Theology," in *Themelios* (1984) vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 6-12.

needs to be viewed from two perspectives. Objectively, and perhaps from the perspective of the blessed, hell is temporal and thus is infinite; from the subjective experience of the damned it is experienced as a fixed or a-temporal state.³⁸⁸

There are, however, several strengths to this conception of hell as a state of fixity. First, this understanding of hell offers a mitigation of the severity of the traditionalist hell: if the experience of the damned is either a-temporal or finite in the subjective experience of the damned, then this would reduce the severity of a torment that lasts for an infinitely long period. However, it could be responded that if the torment (for Blocher consisting primarily of remorse, although understood as retributively inflicted) is just as intense as that which goes on unendingly, then nothing has been gained because what the damned experience in successive moments through time on the traditional understanding they simply experience at the one moment on Blocher's understanding. In other words, the same torment fills up the entire temporal horizon of the damned in each case. In reply, it could be argued that the knowledge of an infinite succession of moments of torment still to come is an extra part of the horror of the usual traditionalist hell, and this is mitigated. My own judgement is that this does constitute a mitigation of the traditionalist hell. It could be argued that this conception of hell is also a mitigation of the severity of an annihilationist hell.

A second strength is that it would rule out subsequent changes or events, whether repentance or extinction. Having written about the Last Judgement, Blocher asks, with reference to the damned: "*And then? What comes next? Nothing.* The concept of a 'next' stage is empty and deceptive... Now, it is death. 'Full stop' for ever and ever..." [there is] no ground whatsoever for any change of the final situation."³⁸⁹ In support, Blocher also argues that "The language of Scripture, with its stereotyped metaphors, and in the role it plays, seems to insist on the durational, permanent character of the state of torment, and to exclude any later change, anything beyond the outcome of the *last* judgment."³⁹⁰ This rules out extinction after torment, since there could be no sequence of events. Further, the argument that the damned would repent if they ceased to sin in hell has been the primary traditionalist objection to the other features of Blocher's position which I will discuss in

³⁸⁸ This would reverse the position put forward by Spanner, noted in chapter 1.

³⁸⁹ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 308. [Italics original].

the next chapter, and therefore this is an important response to it: they simply cannot. Even if there were a subjectively finite experience of time for the damned, which might seem to open the door to repentance or extinction, then Blocher adds that this experience is not new experience, but simply past, presumably in the sense of reflection on past experience.

Given that Blocher thinks that his position is in some sense equivalent to an a-temporal hell, I will turn briefly to look at the discussion on this issue of the nature of time in hell in the debate. Discussion of the nature of time in hell is both rare and usually brief in the recent evangelical debate. Wenham is typical when he simply notes the issue and consigns it to a footnote.

There is the further question as to whether the life of the age to come should be thought of as in time at all. Post-Einsteinians naturally think of space and time as so related that creation would be the creation of space-time, the two being inseparable. This is a philosophical question which the Bible does not address, but it does use time-language concerning heaven. However, this may be because this is the only category in which we can think.³⁹¹

Cotterell makes a more confident assertion:

the emotive element in the discussion of an *eternal* hell is misplaced. We cannot import time into eternity... in a post-Einsteinian world it is remarkable that Christians continue to debate theology in terms appropriate to the state of knowledge of the fifth century, pre-Boethius, as though we did not know the difference between time and eternity. In an eternity there can be no 'day after day'.³⁹²

One writer who has drawn on the insights of Einstein is Spanner, who I noted in chapter 1. Further, it is not only post-Einstein that speculations based on time and eternity have been made. A.H. Strong wrote "that eternal punishment does not necessarily involve endless successions of suffering, - as God's eternity is not mere endlessness so we may not be forever subject to the law of time."³⁹³ However, there has been a lack of discussion of the nature of time in hell, and this is surprising since it seems to provide a way for traditionalists to respond to some of the charges of injustice raised by annihilationists. If the punishment of hell is not in time, then it could be argued that it is not necessarily an infinite punishment, because there is no metre for measuring its length. Yet such a punishment would also be unending, since there are no subsequent events to occur. C.S. Lewis saw a similar advantage to his speculations about the nature of time in hell which he

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

³⁹¹ Wenham, *Case*, p. 177, n. 22.

³⁹² Cotterell, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

³⁹³ Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 1035.

offers them as a response to the objection to Traditionalism that something done in time cannot deserve an infinite penalty.

Another objection turns on the apparent disproportion between eternal damnation and transitory sin. And if we think of eternity as a mere prolongation of time, it is disproportionate. But many would reject this idea of eternity. If we think of time as a line - which is a good image, because the parts of time are successive and no two of them can co-exist; i.e., there is no width in time, only length - we probably ought to think of eternity as a plane or even a solid... If your drew your base line askew, the whole solid will be in the wrong place.³⁹⁴

A timeless eternity would also provide a simple refutation of Annihilationism, since there could be no subsequent events for the damned, such as extinction. The lack of discussion may reflect the philosophical problems of conceiving of an a-temporal existence. However despite these difficulties there is a well established argument in the tradition for an a-temporal heaven, as I noted above on page 61, which could be drawn upon.

In conclusion, Blocher's position can be interpreted to accommodate either of two options for the justification of the punishment of hell, depending on whether the punishment is viewed as infinite or finite in severity. If it is decided that an infinite punishment is justified, because sin committed in this life is of infinite seriousness, then it can be argued that Blocher's hell is indeed infinite. On the other hand, if an infinite punishment is not justified then it could be argued that the punishment of Blocher's hell is finite since the experience of the damned is limited, being either fixed or for a finite period of time. On this option it would not be necessary to argue from the infinite seriousness of sin to establish the justice of hell. I have argued that this modified Traditionalism is a mitigation of classic Traditionalism. It is a form of Traditionalism because the suffering is never ending, but it is a mitigation because the experience of the damned is in some sense limited. There are other elements of Blocher's conception of the nature of hell, of an end to sin and of reconciliation in hell, which I will explore in the following chapter, which would also offer a mitigation of the severity of Traditionalism and thus also serve to meet the objections of those annihilationists who argue that hell is an infinite punishment but less severe than the usual traditionalist one. However since these other elements also provide a response to the annihilationist charge of excessive dualism, I will examine the rest of Blocher's thesis in the next chapter, where I deal with the other major criticism of Traditionalism.

³⁹⁴ Lewis, *Problem*, pp. 111-2.

Chapter 3: The Dualism of Hell

In this chapter I examine the charge of dualism made against Traditionalism by annihilationists. A succinct form of this argument is made by Travis: "Eternal torment involves an eternal cosmological dualism, which it is impossible to reconcile with the conviction that ultimately God will be 'all in all'."³⁹⁵ Dualism is a slippery term, and usage in the literature is varied and often unclear. A brief definition is: "In relation to the problem of evil, the view that the world has a fundamental division between the reality of good and the reality of evil, and that they are in ultimate conflict."³⁹⁶ Therefore, in general terms, the charge is that Traditionalism involves the unending existence of evil in hell, that this is dualistic and should thus be rejected. There is also the implied claim that Annihilationism is not dualistic, and thus offers a preferable doctrine of hell at this point.

I will begin by noting the varied arguments put forward by annihilationists to argue that Traditionalism is dualistic. I will then expound the various alternative resolutions of the problem of dualism argued for or implied by annihilationists. Then I will turn to assessment of the arguments, noting responses made by traditionalists in the literature. Central to my assessment is a distinction which is rarely noted, between continuing suffering and continuing sin. Some annihilationists argue, or assume, that there is dualism if suffering continues unendingly; others argue that there is dualism if sin continues unendingly. My response is that these arguments, which are regularly confused in the literature, are significantly distinct, and lead to different conclusions. If the continuation of suffering is dualistic then I argue that Annihilationism itself is not immune from the charge of at least temporary dualism after the Last Judgment since it holds to at least a period of torment in hell. However, I go on to argue that annihilationists are not being consistent here since they also hold that just punishment is a good, and thus suffering as a part of such punishment is a good and not an evil, and therefore it is not dualistic. Therefore this issue actually turns on the underlying issue of the justice of the punishment of hell.

³⁹⁵ Travis, *Hope*, p.135.

³⁹⁶ David Cook, *Thinking about Faith* (Leicester: IVP, 1986), p. 78.

One aspect of this is the problem of the so-called 'Abominable Fancy', which I will examine in a separate section. In the tradition the phrase refers primarily to the rejection of the notion that the blessed gain 'pleasure' from the sight of the damned, but it also carried the implication that the knowledge of the existence of suffering of the damned in hell will diminish the bliss of heaven. I argue annihilationist criticisms are self-refuting, since they serve to undermine any period of suffering in hell.

I will argue that annihilationists are right to argue that unending sin is properly dualistic, and that they are right to reject it. I will use the terminology of 'sin dualism' for the position I consider to be properly dualistic, and 'suffering dualism' to refer to the position that is claimed by some to be dualistic. I will survey the mainstream traditionalist position, which I will refer to as classic Traditionalism, and conclude that it does usually hold to continuing sin in hell and therefore is properly dualistic. Indeed I suggest that it is the validity of this argument which has caused some annihilationists to argue as well against the continuation of suffering which they have conflated with it. This conclusion leads onto a final, lengthy, section in which I propose a modified form of Traditionalism, drawing particularly on the work of Henri Blocher, which I call Reconciliationism. I argue that this modified form of Traditionalism offers a more satisfactory response to the problem of dualism than classic Traditionalism, and that it may offer a more satisfactory response than Annihilationism. As I argued in Chapter 1, if annihilation is in part held in reaction to the weaknesses of classic Traditionalism, then any diminution of these problems will serve to diminish the doctrinal attraction of Annihilationism to evangelicals. Since the modified form of Traditionalism has been hardly noted at all in the recent debate, and where it has it has overlooked any arguments from a similar doctrine proposed at length in the nineteenth century by theologians such as T.R. Birks, I will expound this modified position at length, with extensive reference to the earlier debate.

There is also at least one more way that dualism is used in the literature, and that is to refer to any position which holds to anything less than the salvation of all people. Thus, although just suffering might be a good, it may not be the highest good available. Therefore it could be said that this 'damnation dualism' holds that the effects of evil are endless and thus, in this limited sense, both Annihilationism and Reconciliationism are

judgement has been completed, there will be two kingdoms, each with its own distinct boundaries, the one Christ's, the other the devil's, the one consisting of good, the other of bad." (*Enchiridion* 111).⁴⁰²

Hughes responds:

it leaves a part of creation which, unrenewed, everlastingly exists in alienation from the new heaven and the new earth...When Christ fills all in all and God is everything to everyone (Eph.1:23; 1 Cor 15:28), how is it conceivable that there can be a section or realm of creation that does not belong to this fullness and by its very presence contradicts it?⁴⁰³

Rather, he argues, the renewal of creation demands the elimination of sin and suffering and death. "The conception of the endlessness of the sufferings of torment and of the endurance of "living" death in hell stands in contradiction to this teaching."⁴⁰⁴ Stott makes essentially the same point when he charges Traditionalism with failing to take account of the 'universalist' texts of scripture. Stott writes, under the heading "Universalism":

My point here... is that the eternal existence of the impenitent in hell would be hard to reconcile with the promises of God's final victory over evil, or with the apparently universalistic texts which speak of Christ drawing all men to himself (John 12:32), and of God uniting all things under Christ's headship (Ephesians 1:10), reconciling all things to himself through Christ (Colossians 1:20), and bringing every knee to bow to Christ and every tongue to confess his lordship (Philippians 2:10-11), so that in the end God will be 'all in all' or 'everything in everybody' (1 Corinthians 15:28).⁴⁰⁵

He concludes that these texts

lead me to ask how God can in any meaningful sense be called 'everything to everybody' while an unspecified number of people still continue in rebellion against him and under his judgement. It would be easier to hold together the awful reality of hell and the universal reign of God if hell means destruction and the impenitent are no more.⁴⁰⁶

The importance of this issue in the debate is indicated by Guillebaud who examines it in his chapter two entitled Will Evil Exist Forever?

A very great difficulty (the present writer feels it to be the greatest of all) in the way of everlasting torment can be expressed in the form of a question. We do not believe that evil has existed from all eternity in the past, but can we believe that it will exist for all future eternity in hell? Will there always be an "outer darkness" outside the kingdom of God, a prison of evil co-eternal with God Himself and His redeemed?⁴⁰⁷

His argument is summed up in a series of rhetorical questions:

⁴⁰² Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 405-6.

⁴⁰⁵ Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁴⁰⁷ Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

But the question which we have to face is how God could be all in all, and how all things could be summed up in Christ, if evil were to exist eternally in hell? Would not His victory be imperfect, and above all would not His kingdom be incomplete? The demons and men in hell would be His conquered enemies, it is true, but His enemies still, with wills and desires in opposition to Him, however unable to make that opposition effective. How then could His kingdom be truly universal, and He Himself "all in all"?... When the present writer still believed in everlasting torment, the only answer that he could give to this difficulty was to suppose that the "outer darkness" was where to all eternity God had willed not to be, an exception to His own decree from His omniscience, excluded from His universal kingdom. When the impossibility of this conception gradually dawned upon him, it did more than anything else to prepare his mind for the change of view to which he was brought about by a re-examination of the whole subject in the Bible.⁴⁰⁸

Later in his book he again emphasises this point:

But the fundamental reasons which led the present writer to abandon the doctrine of everlasting torment are two, both founded on the Word of God. First, the Bible teaching that God will sum up all things in Christ, and that ultimately He Himself will be all in all, seems incompatible with the eternal existence of sin and sinners in hell.⁴⁰⁹

Wenham also raises the charge of dualism against Traditionalism: "If there are human beings alive suffering endless punishment, it would seem to mean that they are in endless opposition to God, that it to say, we have a doctrine of endless sinning as well as of suffering. How can this be if Christ is all in all?"⁴¹⁰ He suggests a distinction between an eternity of suffering and an eternity of sinning, which will be important in my assessment below. A possible implication of Wenham's words is that the charge of dualism is raised against Traditionalism because of the endless sinning of the damned, but not necessarily because of the endless suffering of the damned. When I review the writers already quoted I will argue that this distinction is largely absent. Another writer who perceived the particular problem of continuing sin was Atkinson.

As long as we hold that the wicked live for ever in conscious misery in hell and especially if we hold what seems to be the most terrible aspect of that view, that they continue for ever to sin in hell, this word of the apostle raises grave difficulties. While sinners live and continue to sin, how can God be all in all?⁴¹¹ It is precisely this distinction between the unending nature of the torment and the continuation of sin, which Atkinson points to, which I believe means that annihilationists may look more favourably on a modified Traditionalism which retains the unendingness

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47. The second reason given by Guillebaud was a rejection of the immortality of the soul.

⁴¹⁰ Wenham, *Case, op. cit.*, p. 189.

⁴¹¹ Atkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

of torment, but not 'the most terrible aspect of that view': that they continue to sin in hell. I will develop this position below.

This issue of dualism is also recognised as a key annihilationist argument by traditionalists. Again, though, there is a lack of clarity as to what exactly is being objected to: sin dualism or suffering dualism. Grudem gives it as the fourth of four arguments, and speaks of marring the universe: "Arguments advanced in favour of Annihilationism are: ... (4) the fact that the *continuing presence of evil creatures in God's universe* will eternally mar the perfection of a universe that God created to reflect his glory."⁴¹² Crockett makes a similar point using different terminology in his summary of annihilationist arguments:

The Problem of Harmony. As I have said, the significant point of the annihilationist view is that the wicked will not endure an eternal hell; they will simply be extinguished. If this were not so, say the annihilationists, how could there be harmony in the cosmos? When God creates a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; Rom 8:19-23), is it not reasonable to expect the whole creation to be at peace with God? If somewhere, in some dark corner of the universe, there are still rebellious or suffering creatures gnashing their teeth, how can this be considered harmony?⁴¹³

Sinclair Ferguson also agrees about the importance of the issue. 'This is perhaps the most powerful and appealing theological argument against the orthodox doctrine: how can God be 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28) if there is an 'outside' in the final world order.'⁴¹⁴ In conclusion, a major criticism, and for some *the* major criticism, raised by annihilationists, against Traditionalism is that it is dualistic (what Pinnock calls a "cosmological dualism" and Travis an "eternal cosmological dualism").

3.2 An Assessment of the Annihilationist Arguments

In turning to assessment, I will begin by arguing that Annihilationism has its own temporary suffering dualism. Therefore I will conclude that any annihilationist argument that assumes any degree of dualism after the Last Judgment is inadmissible serves to undermine their own position too. However, I will argue that the stronger argument is that Annihilationism avoids both permanent suffering dualism and sin dualism. I will then note

⁴¹² Grudem, *op. cit.*, p. 1150. [Italics original].

⁴¹³ Crockett, *op. cit.*, p. 63. [Italics original]

that annihilationists tend to conflate two arguments for Traditionalism being dualistic: the damned continue to suffer and the damned continue to sin. I will respond to each objection in turn. First, I will discuss the former objection about continuing suffering. If annihilationists argue that any suffering in hell is dualistic, then it is self-refuting since the damned also suffer in an annihilationist hell. If they respond that temporary suffering is not dualistic, then this must be because suffering justly inflicted is a good, and if it is a good for a finite period it must remain so as long as the punishment remains just. I will note that some annihilationists recognise this. I will also note that some traditionalists also conflate these issues of continuing suffering and sin, which may partially explain the confused response of some annihilationists. A very similar response about just punishment being a good can be made to the annihilationist objection that the knowledge of the damned by the righteous diminishes their bliss, and so I will examine this issue next under the head *The Abominable Fancy*. Second, I will argue that the latter objection about continuing sin does have some validity.

3.2.1 Annihilationism is Also Dualistic

I begin by noting that Annihilationism cannot completely avoid the problem of damnation dualism. Blocher suggests that Annihilationism suffers from what he terms the dualism of 'waste'. He comments that, unlike Annihilationism, on his position "the existence of the lost shall not amount to a total waste, neither for the universe, nor for God, nor for themselves,...".⁴¹⁵ Further, if to deal with dualism is to deal with the problem of evil, then Langton Clarke argues, writing in the early part of the Twentieth Century, that the annihilationist position leaves evil victorious, and thus this type of dualism remains.

But how is [evil] to be expelled? There is the way of Annihilation - expulsion of sin by the destruction of the sinner. But... if this were the method of cure, who would be the victor - God or sin? Would not the victory remain with the evil which compelled God to uncreate His own creation?⁴¹⁶

Macleod argues that even if Annihilationism views evil, under which head he includes both sin and suffering, as coming to an end it doesn't fully avoid the problem of evil, and thus of dualism.

⁴¹⁴ Ferguson, *W.G.T. Shedd and the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment : The Evangelical Library Annual Lecture 1994* (Lewes: F.C.M. Trust, 1994), p. 13.

⁴¹⁵ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

⁴¹⁶ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

[Annihilationism] seems more in keeping with the divine love and offers the hope of a solution to the Problem of Evil. If the annihilationist is correct, Evil will simply cease to exist. There will be no hell, no sinners, no demons, no pain and no suffering. Instead there will be a reconciled universe, perfectly at peace with God. Unfortunately, the solution is not quite as perfect as it appears. The real problem is not the quantity or the duration of Evil, but the fact... God already has an awful lot to answer for: the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrha [sic], the Inquisition, the Holocaust, Aberfan and Kuwait. And Calvary. At every such point (and many more) humanity asks: Why? It is no answer to say: 'Ah! But one day God will put them out of their pain.' He stands accused of permitting pain in the first place. The claim that he won't let it last for ever is a poor defence.⁴¹⁷

Macleod is correct that the extinction of evil is not a complete solution to the problem of evil and of the dualism it entails, although his argument is only valid if Annihilationism is claiming to *fully* resolve the problem of evil. However I don't think that most annihilationists would claim that extinction is a complete avoidance of the problem of damnation dualism, and thus a complete solution to the problem of evil, even though their criticism of Traditionalism may suggest that they are. Thus Stott, for example, argues that extinction only eases or reduces the problem.⁴¹⁸ Guillebaud is clear that the mere extinction of evil does not 'solve' the problem of evil by itself: "Why evil was allowed to come into the universe is an insoluble mystery."⁴¹⁹ Therefore the issue should be whether Annihilationism can reduce the problem of damnation dualism in comparison to Traditionalism.

As I have already noted, there are frequently two elements of the traditionalist hell which annihilationists believe result in an excessive dualism: unending suffering and continuing sin. I will begin by dealing with the issue of unending suffering. In many ways my response is similar to that of the objection that the traditionalist hell shows God as unloving: in both cases, if the punishment, and the resultant suffering, are just, then I would argue that the objection collapses. In this case, if the continuing suffering of the damned is a just punishment, then it is a good, and thus doesn't exacerbate the problem of dualism. Indeed the problem of dualism would be exacerbated by leaving sin unpunished, and thus leaving evil not dealt with. This response in the tradition is given by Augustine, and noted by Blanchard:

⁴¹⁷ Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴¹⁸ Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁴¹⁹ Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 44. If Guillebaud is arguing that we do not have access to a solution to the problem of evil either in this life alone or because we are finite beings, I would agree. If he is taking the irrationalist position that there can be no solution to the problem, then I would reject this.

[Augustine] does not hesitate to argue that since hell is sin's proper punishment, it is itself a "good" thing and not evil. This was how he answered the charge that unending torment made evil (as well as good) eternal - a doctrine he strongly opposed in his dualistic Manichaean adversaries.⁴²⁰

Therefore, "[God] will reign as completely in one place [hell] as in the other [heaven]."⁴²¹

Thus, "Together with Saint Augustine, the classical line insists that punishment, in truth, is no evil added, but the balancing *cancellation* of evil, the moral order repaired, the good vindicated."⁴²² So, the usual argument is that sin that is justly punished is a good and not an evil. This argument can and is used by both traditionalists and annihilationists.

Therefore, for example, Helm writes,

[W]hile there is pain in hell, and pain is in some sense an evil, the pain of hell is *deserved* pain. It is penal pain. If pain *per se* is an evil, then hell is the triumph of evil. But if, on the other hand, hell is a just place, because none suffer there except those who deserve to suffer, and none suffer more, nor less, than they deserve, then hell is not evil.⁴²³

Grudem agrees, and rightly argues:

Regarding the fourth argument (by annihilationists), while evil that remains unpunished does detract from God's glory in the universe, we also must realize that when God punishes evil and triumphs over it, the glory of his justice, righteousness, and power to triumph over all opposition will be seen (see Rom. 9:17, 22-24).⁴²⁴

Again, Blanchard maintains that God's victory of being 'all in all' would not be challenged by the existence of hell - rather hell glorifies God's justice.⁴²⁵ Fernando claims that all will kneel at Christ's throne and acknowledge him with fear and regret if they are in hell, and that all are reconciled to God as he crushes the impenitents' rebellion by consigning them to hell - an area still under the jurisdiction of God.⁴²⁶ However traditionalists have sometimes obscured this point. For example, Macleod responds to the charge of cosmic dualism against the traditionalist position by arguing that hell is *outside* of the ordered cosmos:

[E]ven the redeemed, reconciled world includes a Black Hole - the place prepared for the devil and his angels. Yet to speak of this as an eternal, cosmic, dualism is misleading. Cosmic is exactly what it is not. Cosmic (hence cosmetics) is beauty.

⁴²⁰ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁴²² Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 292 [Italics original.]

⁴²³ Helm, *op. cit.*, p. 114. [Italics original].

⁴²⁴ Grudem, *op. cit.*, p. 1151. Grudem is careful to note that this is not a complete solution to the problem of dualism: "yet after all this has been said, we have to admit that the ultimate resolution of this question lies far beyond our ability to understand, and remains hidden in the counsels of God." [p. 1151].

⁴²⁵ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, pp. 221f.

⁴²⁶ Fernando, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-7. I will go on to argue that rebellion is only fully crushed if the damned cease to sin.

It means ordered reality. In that sense hell is not part of the cosmos. It is the receptacle within which, at last, God confines the world's sin. But it is not outside the world. It is outer darkness. It is Outside. Light-less. Lawless. Love-less: the place where men indulge, and suffer, the collapsed moral order which unbelief and impenitence have chosen.⁴²⁷

While Macleod avoids the charge of cosmic dualism, it is at too high a cost. The traditional argument that retributive punishment is a good, and thus hell is a just punishment for sin, entails that hell *is* part of the 'cosmos': the 'ordered reality'. However, on this assumption Macleod's argument seems to imply that hell is not a just punishment and is thus an evil, which heightens the very dualism he is trying to avoid. He also seems unable to affirm the universal rule of God. What Traditionalism has usually maintained is that hell is in the cosmos and thus is not dualistic. Further, some traditionalists in the recent debate have argued from the current existence of sin and evil to that of eternal sin and evil, claiming that this raises no significant extra difficulties. Dixon seems to take the even stronger line that eternal evil raises no extra problems at all: "We must also argue that if God can be completely holy and good and yet allow evil (although restrained) to be present *now* in His creation, why not *forever* (but confined to a place called the lake of fire)?"⁴²⁸ Blanchard acknowledges that eternal evil is a problem, but less of a problem than current evil. He writes:

... one might add that the endless existence of a moral 'black hole' is not the greatest unsolved problem with regard to sin. After all, if in his perfect holiness God can allow evil now he can certainly do so in eternity. A much greater problem is the very existence of sin at all as such an absurd and irrational curse on the universe.⁴²⁹

Again, this position overlooks the fact that evil without punishment would be open to the charge of dualism, but that both annihilationists and traditionalists can rightly argue that only punished evil will continue beyond the Last Judgment.

3.3 The Abominable Fancy

I now turn to the related annihilationist objection that the sight or knowledge of the continuing suffering of the damned will diminish the blessedness of the righteous in heaven. I am using the term 'the Abominable Fancy' to refer to this awareness of the state of the damned by those in heaven. I will argue that the issue must also turn chiefly on the

⁴²⁷ Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴²⁸ Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁴²⁹ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

prior issue of the justice of the punishment of hell, but I include it in this chapter, rather than the previous one, for several reasons. First, it is presented independently of the issue of justice in most annihilationist literature, and in some traditionalist responses to Annihilationism. Second, a variation on this argument has been used as a positive argument for Traditionalism, which does not entirely overlap with the issue of justice. Pinnock briefly mentions this related issue, which has a long history in the tradition: that from the perspective of heaven, hell "was a dimension of the divine artistry" and by seeing what it was that they had avoided, "believers, far from being disturbed by these hellish torments, would experience satisfaction and admiration on account of them."⁴³⁰ Third, the annihilationist argument can be understood, as with the argument above, as a reaction against an excessive dualism of continuing sin. Fourth, the modified Traditionalism I will propose in response to the charge of excessive dualism serves to reduce the problem, and may even result in a more sympathetic response to the traditional idea of the knowledge of hell increasing the blessing of heaven.

Before examining the objection I will first sketch out the place of this notion in the tradition. From the assumption that the righteous would be aware of, or even be able to see, hell there arose in the tradition an argument for Traditionalism based on it: hell adds to the bliss of the saints.⁴³¹ In a section entitled 'The Abominable Fancy', Walker notes two ways in which hell adds to the bliss of the righteous: "This sight gives them joy because it is a manifestation of God's justice and hatred of sin, but chiefly because it provides a contrast which heightens their awareness of their own bliss."⁴³² Dean Farrar first described this aspect of the traditional doctrine of hell as 'an abominable fancy',⁴³³ and it has become a semi-technical term in the literature through the usage of Walker. I have therefore decided to use the term, although it is clearly highly pejorative. The Abominable Fancy is a very significant part of the tradition. Walker notes that, "It has moreover the support of the greatest Doctors of the Church, St. Augustine⁴³⁴ and St. Thomas Aquinas,⁴³⁵ and the

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁴³¹ There is also a much rarer position in the tradition, in which hell is required to serve as a warning to the saints to prevent them from falling. I will note this below.

⁴³² Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁴³³ F.W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope* (five sermons preached in Westminster Abbey in 1877), (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 66.

⁴³⁴ Augustine *Civ. Dei*, XX, xxi, xxii. It appears also in Tertullian and St. Cyprian (see G. Bardy, ["Les Pères de l'Eglise en face des problèmes posés par l'enfer"] in *L'Enfer* [Paris: Collection Foi Vivante, 1950], pp. 152-3).

Master of the Sentences, Peter of Lombardy.^{436,437} A classic statement of the value of hell to the righteous is from Aquinas, in response to the question: "Whether the Blessed Rejoice in the Punishment of the Wicked?"

I answer that, A thing may be a matter of rejoicing in two ways. First directly, when one rejoices in a thing as such: and thus the saints will not rejoice in the punishment of the wicked. Secondly, indirectly, by reason namely of something annexed to it: and in this way the saints rejoice in the punishment of the wicked, by considering therein the order of Divine justice and their own deliverance, which will fill them with joy.⁴³⁸

Rowell notes that "Aquinas argued against annihilationism because he believed the glory of the blessed to be enhanced by their knowledge of the torments of the damned."⁴³⁹ Walker continues that "It is therefore odd that this aspect of hell should become almost obsolete by the 17th century,..."⁴⁴⁰ However, a prominent example of a later writer using this argument is Jonathan Edwards. Examples could be multiplied, but a typical one comes from a sermon entitled *The wicked useful in their destruction only*: "The destruction of the unfruitful is of use, to give the saints a greater sense of their happiness, and of God's grace to them."⁴⁴¹ With the rise in particular of humanitarianism the idea of pleasure at the suffering of others has become a 'problem' in the western world and thus the Abominable Fancy has generally fallen into sharp disuse.⁴⁴² It is not prominent in traditionalist writings in the recent debate, although some traditionalists do argue that eternal conscious torment glorifies God, rather than counting against Him. Gerald Bray provides one of the clearest statements of this view:

... if the non-elect have no hope of salvation and God does not want them to suffer unduly, why were they ever created in the first place? Their existence must serve some purpose, and once that is admitted the view that their eternal punishment glorifies the justice of God seems perfectly logical.⁴⁴³

An important distinction within the tradition, that is vital to keep clear, is made by Gerstner:

The "righteous" are not to take any "ungodly joy at the fate of the righteous." This, of course, is agreed by all... I do not deny that Orthodoxy sees a godly joy in

⁴³⁵ Aquinas, *op. cit.*, Suppl., Q. 94, art. i.

⁴³⁶ Petrus Lomb., *Sent.*, IV, dist. 50.7 (Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, T. 192, col. 962).

⁴³⁷ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁴³⁸ Aquinas, *op. cit.*, Q. 94, Art. 3, p. 2961.

⁴³⁹ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁴¹ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 127. See also, for example, vol. 2, p. 87.

⁴⁴² See Norman Fiering, *Compassion, op. cit.*, pp. 195-218.

⁴⁴³ Bray, *art. cit.*, p. 23. See also Fernando, *op. cit.*, pp. 95ff; Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-4.

heaven's contemplating hell not because of the misery of the damned, but because of the justice of God in the inflicting of that misery.⁴⁴⁴

A further aspect, that was often held as a corollary of this, is the notion that part of the pain of hell comes from contemplating the bliss of the righteous in heaven. Perhaps not surprising for a Jonathan Edwards scholar, Gerstner has several references to this rarer idea in the modern debate: "Hell's misery is made perfect by the sight of the saints (whom they had despised and hated in this world in return for the saints' love of them and efforts for their salvation) enjoying everlasting bliss (Luke 16:23-26)."⁴⁴⁵

Finally a rare argument for the value of hell to heaven is noted in the ACUTE report.

Another more speculative rationale for the continuation of hell in God's 'new order of things' is mooted by Blanchard and elaborated by the evangelical biophysicist Douglas Spanner. This argues that an everlasting hell would actually be 'good news', because it would show that God would never ever compromise with sin, and would thereby put an end to the possibility of sin ever breaking out *again* and ruining his new creation, as it did in the beginning with Adam and Eve. As Spanner puts it, hell in this scenario would serve as the '*never-definitively ending evidence* that God will tolerate no defiance of his wise and sovereign authority', and would be necessary 'lest the temptation to rebel' occurred once more.⁴⁴⁶

Birks, who also believed that the righteous in heaven are not only able to sin in heaven but might be tempted to do so, makes this point, and uses it as an argument against Annihilationism. Rowell presents the conclusion of his argument:

Birks suggests that the continued knowledge of the lost by the blessed makes redemption a perpetually revealed, present reality, whereas, if the wicked were annihilated, redemption would only be the recollection of an ever-fading past as far as the blessed were concerned.⁴⁴⁷

However, the belief that the righteous can sin is not usually held in the tradition, and the ACUTE report rightly concludes: "Intriguing though this idea may be, conditionalists could retort that its premise of a potential 'second fall' is nowhere attested in Scripture."⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁴ Gerstner, *op. cit.*, p. 151 quoting Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 195. And, Edwards would add, the emphasising of his grace to them, and their happiness.

⁴⁴⁵ Gerstner, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁴⁴⁶ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 108, quoting Spanner, *op. cit.*, p. 120 [Italics original], and referring to Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁴⁴⁷ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 126. See Birks, *Victory*, p. 205.

⁴⁴⁸ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

3.3.1 The Annihilationist Arguments

The concept of the Abominable Fancy has been frequently referred to by annihilationists in the recent debate, being given as one of the reasons for rejecting a traditionalist hell: that far from increasing the bliss of heaven, the awareness of the continued existence of hell greatly detracts from it, and therefore for heaven to be heaven there can be no hell of unending torment. It is the first reason Michael Green gives for his rejection of Traditionalism:

There is no doubt that many earnest Christians hold [to Traditionalism], but all the same I doubt that it is a genuinely *Christian* option. What sort of God would he be who could rejoice eternally in heaven with the saved, while downstairs the cries of the lost made an agonising cacophony? Such a God is not the person revealed in Scripture as utterly just and utterly loving.⁴⁴⁹

Wenham writes: "I plead guilty also to failing to see how God and the saints could be in perfect bliss with human beings hopelessly sinning and suffering."⁴⁵⁰ Fudge quotes F.W.

Farrar:

[His words] are directed to any who ask how they can be confident of everlasting happiness unless they know the damned will suffer without end. The whole question Farrar regarded as wicked and selfish, and his response exploded from his heart: "... I would here, and now, and kneeling on my knees, ask Him that I might die as the beasts that perish, and for ever cease to be, rather than that my worst enemy should, for one single year, endure the hell described by Tertullian, or Minicius, or Jonathan Edwards, or Dr. Pusey, or Mr. Furniss, or Mr. Moody, or Mr. Spurgeon."⁴⁵¹

I would also note the summary of the key arguments for Annihilationism, given recently by the traditionalist J.I. Packer. He writes:

Let us look at the biblical arguments used [by annihilationists]. They reduce to four... Third, it is said that the harmony of the new heaven and earth will be marred if somewhere the lost continue to exist in impenitence and distress... Fourth, it is said that the joy of heaven will be marred by knowledge that some continue under merited retribution.⁴⁵²

The surprise in Packer's list is his fourth point. Evangelical annihilationists (with the possible exceptions of Pinnock and Travis who raise questions about retributive justice, noted above) formally share the traditionalist view that merited retribution is a 'good', and thus presumably would not mar the joy of heaven. Therefore, by separating this fourth

⁴⁴⁹ Green, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁴⁵⁰ Wenham, *Case*, p. 189.

⁴⁵¹ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 196, quoting Farrar, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

⁴⁵² Packer, *Problem*, pp. 12-13.

point Packer seems to suggest that it is an argument based not on the injustice of the punishment but an emotional dislike of any suffering at all. I think that Packer is accurate and that in the recent debate the argument is indeed raised by some annihilationists in such a way that it is divorced from the prior issue of justice. Carson also notes the importance of this issue for annihilationists when he summarises their argument about dualism in terms of the spoiling of heaven. "(6) Does not the notion of a continuing hell with conscious suffering inmates jar against the image of the new heaven and the new earth, created to reflect God's glory and extol his perfections? Would not an ongoing hell mar heaven?"⁴⁵³

However not all annihilationists are happy to use this argument. Both annihilationist exceptions I have found come from the Nineteenth century. Constable argues in a way similar to some traditionalists when he argues that the 'Abominable Fancy', far from being a problem, is rather the chief purpose of hell. He begins by stating that "... the grand object of all-wise punishment [is] the lesson taught by it to those who have not offended," and continues that "...eternal death inflicted on sinners is *eternally felt*, and has an eternal influence on the parties whom it was intended principally to effect."⁴⁵⁴ However, this is not to say that the extinction of the damned won't be welcomed by the onlooking blessed as well as the damned themselves: "So the close of each agonised life in hell would be longed for there [in hell]; [and] would send a thrill of relief throughout the habitations of the blessed."⁴⁵⁵ Edward White also seems to go some way towards this view when he states that punishment in the life to come was not purely retributive, but also vindictory. "Scripture represents judgement (krisis), the display to the whole rational creation of the justice of the ways of God, rather than punishment as such (krima), as the *primary object*, so to speak, of extending the resurrection, not only to the just, but to the unjust."⁴⁵⁶ These are rare examples of annihilationists using the classic traditionalist response to the charge of the purposelessness of hell and the Abominable Fancy: that hell serves to display the justice of God. They don't appear at all in the modern debate amongst annihilationists, although there is no logical reason why they should not.

⁴⁵³ Carson, *Gagging*, p. 520.

⁴⁵⁴ Constable, *op. cit.*, p. 25. [Italics in original]

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁵⁶ White, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

Constable refers to the annihilation of sinners being 'eternally felt' by the righteous. In other words despite their extinction the memory of their punishment remains in some form. This question of whether the saints will have any memory of hell even after the last of the damned are annihilated is a significant issue because if the saints can remember hell then it would seem that, if the present perception of the sufferings of the damned limits the bliss of heaven, then the memory of it would also continue to trouble them. Thus any annihilationist who argues against Traditionalism on the basis of the Abominable Fancy would seem to also argue against the saints' memory of hell. It is an issue rarely discussed by annihilationists, and where they do they hold differing positions. Philip Hughes suggests that the memory of hell will be lost:

Their lot, whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life, is the destruction of the second death. Thus God's creation will be purged of all falsity and defilement, and the ancient promise will be fulfilled that "the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind" as the multitude of the redeemed are glad and rejoice forever in the perfection of the new heaven and the new earth (Is. 65:17f.; Rev. 21:1-4).⁴⁵⁷

However some annihilationists argue for the existence of some sort of memory, with the implication that if hell is just then it is a good. Guillebaud writes on Jude 7: "The conclusion of the discussion... is that the "unquenchable fire" represents a perpetual memorial of God's righteous judgement, which continues for ever after the existence of the condemned has ended."⁴⁵⁸ Several annihilationists share this interpretation of the phrase 'unquenchable fire' as a perpetual memorial. If it is to be a comprehensible memorial it must serve to remind the righteous about the punishment of the damned. Fudge also argues that hell is unendingly memorialised. Commenting on Revelation 14:9-11 he argues that, the damned's destruction "is forever memorialised in the smoke that remains."⁴⁵⁹ This might seem to be contradicted by his quotation of Mounce on Revelation 14:9-11, which he notes with seeming approval. "... there is no suggestion that the suffering of the damned takes place in the presence of martyred believers who now rejoice to see their oppressors burning in hell."⁴⁶⁰ However, that Fudge is objecting not to *any* view of hell from heaven, but to Schadenfreude, is indicated by the comment which immediately follows: "The Old Testament often speaks of the righteous beholding the

⁴⁵⁷ Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

⁴⁵⁸ Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁹ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

⁴⁶⁰ R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation (The New International Commentary on the New Testament, gen. ed. F.F. Bruce) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 276, quoted by Fudge, op. cit., p. 297.*

evidence of the wicked's destruction, but it does not have them gloating over their actual pain either."⁴⁶¹ If then Fudge believes that there is an eternal memorial of the punishment of the wicked, this raises the problem of how this can be reconciled with his quotation of Farrar above. It could be that Fudge believes that the extinction will be remembered, but not the suffering of the damned. However, I think it more likely that the point Fudge wants to make is not that suffering in hell per se diminishes the blessedness of heaven (the problem of squeamishness), but that a traditionalist hell diminishes it because it is unjust.

3.3.2 An Assessment of the Annihilationist Arguments

The notion that the knowledge or sight of the damned in hell increases the bliss of the righteous in heaven has fallen into general disuse and, from being a central aspect in traditional teaching on hell, it is now a comparative rarity amongst traditionalists. However the argument that the very opposite is the case, which I have termed the 'Abominable Fancy', that this knowledge of hell in heaven would reduce the bliss of heaven, is a common annihilationist argument in the recent debate. Thus, annihilationists argue that, for heaven to be heaven there can't be an unending hell of conscious torment.

The response to the annihilationist argument depends upon the point they are making: if they are arguing that *unjust* suffering would diminish the bliss of heaven, then traditionalists would agree with them, and the issue would be the prior question of what is a just punishment for the damned. Packer states that "since in heaven Christians will be like God in character, loving what he loves and taking joy in all his self-manifestation, including his justice, there is no reason to think that their joy will be impaired in this way."⁴⁶² Ajith Fernando believes the punishment of a traditionalist hell to be just and so he can argue that "we will be able to agree *wholeheartedly* with the judgement of God upon our lost loved ones."⁴⁶³ This positive attitude towards just suffering is equally a position that an annihilationist may take of the attitude of the righteous in heaven, and some, such

⁴⁶¹ Fudge, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-8.

⁴⁶² Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 18. I would also note Bray's comment that, since the existence of heaven and hell side-by-side promoted no problems to the minds of biblical writers, it should not therefore promote a difficulty to the minds of modern day annihilationists. [Bray, *art. cit.*, p. 23]

⁴⁶³ Fernando, *op. cit.*, p. 69. However, Fernando adds that in heaven bliss can co-exist with regret over the lost [*Ibid.*, pp. 70-71] which leaves open the question of the degree of "regret" that is possible in heaven for it still to be heaven.

as Constable, clearly have done. However, if annihilationists suggest that *any* suffering of the damned, even if just, serves to diminish the bliss of heaven then this raises a series of problems. First, if such diminution of bliss is an unacceptable state for the righteous to be in, then this would immediately undermine any suffering of the damned after the Last Judgement. However, if it is argued that the diminution of the bliss of the righteous is acceptable, then if it is acceptable for a temporary period, it must also be acceptable permanently if it remains a just punishment. Carson makes this point and suggests that the reason this logic is not perceived is that there has been a shift in the understanding of suffering away from the notion that suffering as a result of just punishment is a good.

The assumption that eternal conscious punishment would be needlessly cruel owes something, I suspect, to a shift in our view of suffering... The shift in model is surely behind Pinnock's rhetorical question... "Does the one who told us to love our enemies intend to wreck vengeance on his own enemies for all eternity?"⁴⁶⁴ But the logic of his question surely demands revision: "Does the one who told us to love our enemies intend to wreck vengeance on his own enemies?" So far as I know, Pinnock would answer that question in the affirmative, though probably he would recast the question a little. Justice must prevail; just punishment must be meted out; vengeance in the purest sense belongs to the Lord. What then is different about the question by adding the final three words, "for all eternity"? If justice is still prevailing, if just punishment is still being meted out... then Pinnock's objection falls to the ground. If just punishment was *ever* justly meted out, then Pinnock should not cast his question as if to imply that *any* display of justice contradicts the command to love one's enemies.⁴⁶⁵

However, if it is argued that the diminution of the bliss of heaven is acceptable, but only for a limited period, then this raises other problems: the creation of a New Intermediate State; explaining the place of memory; and the extinction of Satan. I will now examine these points in greater detail. First, if it is argued that even the just punishment of the damned in hell will diminish the bliss of heaven, then the annihilationist position introduces what I will term a 'New Intermediate State' into eschatology, with a period between the Last Judgement and the extinction of the final sinner in hell. I say *new* since it is also widely held, especially by traditionalists, that there is existence after death and before the last judgement, which is often called the "intermediate state." On this new position there would seem to be a period of 'limited' bliss in heaven while those in hell continue in torment, followed, after an unspecified period, with the annihilation of the last person in hell and then unalloyed bliss. The only hint of recognition of this possibility I

⁴⁶⁴ Pinnock, *Destruction*, p.247.

have found is from Guillebaud, who is clearer than most annihilationists in his chronology, and who argues that,

in 1 Corinthians 15:28 Paul is writing of the final consummation of all things, the last event of which the Word of God has anything to say, the ultimate completion of the victory of God... Nothing is said as to how long that end may be delayed. But it will surely come,...⁴⁶⁶

This is to introduce a novel doctrine that is nowhere in the tradition. There is also the wider issue of whether there are such significant events after the Last Judgment. It could be argued that the notion of any event for the damned after the Last judgement is to evade the force of it being the *last* judgement. Blocher writes: "The language of Scripture, with its stereotyped metaphors, and in the role it plays, seems to insist on the durational, permanent character of the state of torment, and to exclude any later change, anything beyond the outcome of the *last* judgement."⁴⁶⁷ A possible response would be that extinction was determined as the final element of the punishment at the Last Judgment, but I still think that Blocher's argument carries weight.⁴⁶⁸

This criticism of a New Intermediate State is valid, I believe, for annihilationists who believe that the punishment of the damned comes *after* the Last Judgement. This is the majority position in the recent debate, and I have been assuming it in my definition of Annihilationism. However this problem would be avoided by an annihilationist who holds one of two positions. First, they could hold that the punishment of torment takes place in the Intermediate State before the Last Judgement. The only advocate of such a position I have found is Edward White. Thus one of White's reasons for holding to the "survival of the spirits of sinful men in death," while rejecting the innate immortality of the soul, was to assign a special horror to the second death with the extinction of the soul. There are two main reasons, though, why this variant has been rarely adopted by annihilationists. First, most annihilationists deny the natural immortality of the soul and this is then usually believed to undermine any belief in a conscious intermediate state. White certainly denied the immortality of the soul, and yet was very unusual in not drawing the usual corollary of a denial of the intermediate state. Second, if the extinction occurred at the Last Judgement

⁴⁶⁵ Carson, *Gagging*, pp. 530-531.

⁴⁶⁶ Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁷ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

⁴⁶⁸ One consequence of Annihilationism is that it is committed to a temporal afterlife for both the damned as well as for the righteous until the final extinction. This follows from the structure of their position: the

then it is difficult to see how punishment could be just since some people would have spent thousands of years in torment in the Intermediate State while others would spend very little time there, or even perhaps none for those still alive at the Second Coming.

A second alternative an annihilationist could adopt to avoid the problem of creating a New Intermediate State is to hold that punishment takes place at the Last Judgement. As I have shown, this may be the position of Pinnock. The difficulty that Pinnock himself acknowledges with this position is that, as with the position above, it is difficult to account for degrees of torment. Further, as with the position above, it is very rare amongst annihilationists.

A second problem for the annihilationist who argues that the existence of hell limits the bliss of heaven, is the place of memory. First, there is the memory the righteous would have of the damned after their extinction. While debate has usually focused on the immediate apprehension of a 'present' hell, it seems that the problem is not removed if there is an unending memory or memorial of a completed past event. Blocher makes a similar objection with reference to Universalism, which probably implies that memory remains: "... the problem of God's love remains, though it may be felt to be less acute, if the final state of many is annihilation or extinction. The orthodox could argue that even universalists have to face it: should all suffering cease, *having suffered* shall never be abolished!"⁴⁶⁹ An obvious response is to argue that the memory of the damned will be erased from the minds of the righteous, as P.E. Hughes does.⁴⁷⁰ This is not an argument restricted to annihilationists, and from the traditionalist side Blanchard suggests that both God and the blessed will forget at least their own sins. "If we dare to use such language [from Jeremiah 31:34], God will have a mental block as far as the sins of his people are concerned. What is more, so will [the blessed], or they could not be perfectly happy."⁴⁷¹ One difficulty with this position is to determine how one can have selective memories of one's past life on earth without recalling the existence of the damned. Further, if memory is selectively erased, there is the question of how Christ's death is to be remembered. To

damned are tormented for differing periods of time, while the righteous wait until the period of torment is completed.

⁴⁶⁹ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 293. Blocher footnotes J. Hick, *Evil and the Love of God* (London: Collins, 1974, 3rd pr. [1st ed. Macmillan, 1966]), p. 378, p. 386.

⁴⁷⁰ Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

⁴⁷¹ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

understand Christ's atonement would include recollection of the suffering endured as punishment for sin, and the penalty faced by those who were not saved. Thus even if the memories of the righteous were purged, there remains a permanent reminder of torment in heaven in the marks of Christ's passion that he bears in his resurrected body. Macleod writes: "The Throne itself bears eternally the marks of the cross (Rev. 5.6)."⁴⁷² Indeed the annihilationist objection I am considering here makes it very difficult to see what place there can be for remembering the cross, either in heaven or now on earth, since it shows the suffering involved in the just punishment of a sin. Finally, there may also be an issue in determining wherein lies the basis of personal continuity, if elements of memory are erased.⁴⁷³ Thus another difficulty with the annihilationist position which argues from the Abominable Fancy, irrespective of the issue of the justice of hell, is that it fails to take adequate account of the operation of memory.⁴⁷⁴

A third problem for Annihilationism is that of the unending suffering of other, demonic, beings in hell. Several traditionalists have used the parallel of Satan to argue against Annihilationism. Jonathan Edwards bases the parallel on a text from Revelation: "Again, wicked men will suffer the same kind of death with the devils; as in verse 25th of [Rev. xx], "Depart ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Now the punishment of the devil is not annihilation, but torment;..."⁴⁷⁵ Calvin also argues from the parallel of Satan and the damned in his *Psychopannychia* to argue against a form of Annihilationism. Having used the analogy of Satan to show that someone can experience death, and yet still be conscious, he goes on to ask whether there will "be any end to that death" in Satan's case? His answer is in the negative, from which he argues that the wicked too, "although dead... shall still feel eternal fire and the worm which dieth not."⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷² Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Macleod is using this point to counter the claim of annihilationists that their position solves the problem of dualism.

⁴⁷³ The memory theory of personal continuity holds that continuity of memory, rather than material or the soul's continuity, is the key. See, for example, C.W. Bynum, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: a Scholastic Discussion in its Medieval and Modern Contexts," in *The History of Religions*, no. 30, p. 60.

⁴⁷⁴ The ACUTE report also comments on the biblical evidence for the memory or present awareness of the damned by the blessed. "Presumably, if God wanted to remove all knowledge of the fate of the damned (whether ongoing or not) from the consciousness of the righteous, he could do so. The problem, however, is that Scripture sometimes paints a picture which is rather different from this." ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 109. Biblical passages are discussed, *ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

⁴⁷⁵ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 85, col. 2.

⁴⁷⁶ J. Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, in *Tracts and Treatises in Defense of the Reformed Faith*, tr. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), vol. 3, p. 453, quoted in Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

If the unending torment of angelic beings in hell also limits the bliss of heaven then presumably the annihilationist has to argue that Satan and his angels should be extinguished too. However I don't think that this raises any significant further doctrinal difficulties for the annihilationist, but it encourages caution in proceeding since there is almost no such claim in the tradition.⁴⁷⁷ Alternatively, if it is maintained that Satan is not extinguished, then, as well as responding to the above arguments, the annihilationist needs to explain why the unending torment of Satan isn't subject to the same arguments that they raise against Traditionalism: for example, that it is unjust in the length of the sentence; and that it results in an excessive dualism.

As I have noted, the classic traditionalist position is that rather than the sight of the damned diminishing the bliss of the blessed, it actually achieves the very opposite effect, and increases their bliss. This is not pleasure in the torments of the damned, but in the justice of God displayed in their punishment. If such a sight does increase the bliss of the righteous, then extinction would necessarily reduce it. Thus if there is any validity to such arguments, that the sight of the damned is of benefit to the righteous, and I think that there is, then it serves as an argument against Annihilationism, on the assumption that the blessing of the righteous will be maximised.

In conclusion, in this section I have sought to show that the annihilationists' attempt to avoid the problem of the Abominable Fancy fails. I have argued that their criticism of Traditionalism argues for too much. In arguing that the sight of any suffering, even justly inflicted, will diminish the bliss of the damned, annihilationists leave no place for any torment in hell and thus undermine their own position. If they argue that a temporary period of the diminution of the blessedness of the righteous is permissible, then it creates a new intermediate state and does not take account of the presence of memory and of the crucified Christ in heaven. However, I have also argued, as some annihilationist have seen more clearly than others, that the disagreement with traditionalists at this point actually boils down to a disagreement about the justice of the punishment of an unending hell: if an unending hell is *unjust* then it cannot serve to display to the blessed the justice of God.

However, if the punishment of hell is just then the blessed must therefore be able to praise God for hell.

Further, although the annihilationist argument *in the form they present it* boils down to the question of justice, I think that there is actually another issue influencing the debate on this issue. This is suggested by the fact that the collapse of the annihilationist argument into the question of justice is a rather obvious point, and some explanation seems necessary to explain the inability of so many writers to note it. A strong candidate for this influential, but unacknowledged, issue is the state of the damned: that they continue to sin and to rebel against the justice of God. I now turn to discuss this feature of classic Traditionalism.

3.4 Traditionalism's Problem of Unending Sin

One element of the annihilationist charge of excessive dualism against Traditionalism is, I believe, valid. As I have already noted, it is important to distinguish two elements in the annihilationist charge that are usually treated as if they were synonymous: the existence of suffering in hell and the existence of sin and rebellion in hell. As I will argue below, it is possible to conceive of a hell in which the damned suffer punishment for sins committed in this life, and yet do not continue to sin in hell, and in fact may even praise God for the justice of his judgements. This confusion is common. Thus, for example, P.E. Hughes, whom I quoted above, moves from saying that an everlasting hell "means that suffering and death will never be totally abolished from the scene," to concluding that the inescapable logic of this position is a separate kingdom, ruled by the devil and consisting of "bad," that is sin. However the logic is not, I believe, inescapable: suffering in hell does not imply either the continuation of sin or rebellion in hell. Such a misunderstanding is hardly surprising, though, since almost every traditionalist assumes the same logic. Thus annihilationists are simply arguing on the same assumption as those they disagree with. In assessing the value of the argument I want to clearly distinguish these two elements. I believe that the charge of dualism is correct where the damned in hell continue to sin and remain in a state of rebellion. As several annihilationists rightly point out, such a position cannot be reconciled with what Stott calls the universalist texts of scripture, that in the end

⁴⁷⁷ It is also exegetically more problematic which is the primary reason for the rarity of this position in the tradition. One of the strongest texts in support of a traditionalist position is Rev. 20:10 which refers to

God will be 'all in all'. However the charge of dualism fails where the damned merely suffer punishment without continuing to sin and rebel against God. As I have stated above, where sin is justly punished it is part of the 'cosmos', part of the ordered creation, and thus it is not dualistic. In other words, my argument is that if annihilationists accept that the retributive punishment of sin is just then such punishment is not dualistic; if they argue that it is dualistic then it is hard to see how they can justify *any* such punishment after the Last Judgement. However, their criticisms are probably assuming that traditionalists are arguing for more than this, in particular including the notion of continuing sin, which is dualistic. Therefore the problem is not to do with the continued existence of punishment and the torment, but with the attitude of the damned, and in particular their continued sinning.

To conclude, in this chapter so far I have argued that the case for Annihilationism and for the rejection of Traditionalism as dualistic is not as strong as annihilationists have claimed. However I believe that the annihilationist charge of dualism in Traditionalism does carry weight, and thus neither position is without significant problems. I now want to propose a modified form of Traditionalism, which I will term Reconciliationism, which I will argue deals better with the problem of dualism than either Annihilationism or classic Traditionalism.

3.5 Reconciliationism: A Modified Traditionalism

In the remainder of this chapter I will propose certain modifications to the traditionalist understanding of hell, based on some suggestions made by Henri Blocher. Blocher presented his position in its clearest form in a paper presented to the Rutherford House Theological conference in 1991, and published in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* in the following year. Blocher had already touched on some of these ideas in previous articles,⁴⁷⁸ but this Rutherford House paper is the place he develops them at greatest length. However even here his treatment is brief. I will give an exposition and assessment of each of the elements of Blocher's position in turn, as well as a fuller exposition of the

Satan and his angels.

⁴⁷⁸ I have cited these in the previous chapter, p. 97, n. 362.

traditionalist position of which they are a modification.⁴⁷⁹ In the course of the argument below I will focus on the arguments of Blocher, since he is a contributor to the recent evangelical debate and indeed is the only writer in the recent debate who has proposed them as an alternative position. In expounding and developing this position I will also refer at length to the older debate where it can serve to supplement or clarify the issues. The reason for this use of older material is to supplement the very limited discussion of the issues raised by this Reconciliationism in the recent debate. I will note two forerunners to these ideas. First, apparently without Blocher's knowledge, he is heir to a broad position about which there was considerable debate and interest in the nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries. In this earlier debate most of the proponents of this modified Traditionalism regarded it as so distinct as to be a fourth type of view of hell alongside Traditionalism, Annihilationism and Universalism. However I will argue that it is actually best understood as a modification of Traditionalism, although for clarity I will refer to it by the neologism Reconciliationism. The second, and rather surprising, type of forerunner to these ideas, especially that of lucidity, are classic traditionalist writers themselves. However, these modifications are not applied to the whole period of hell, but usually limited to the Last Judgement. I am arguing that the arguments for their use are sound and they should be extended to the period after the Last Judgement too.

I will argue for three main conclusions, each more far-reaching than the previous. My minimal conclusion will be that one advantage of these modifications is that they serve to reduce the dualism of the traditionalist position, although they do not remove it entirely. This reduction in dualism may, I will suggest, give a reason for annihilationists to accept this form of Traditionalism, particularly if my observation is correct that Annihilationism has developed in part as a reaction to the perceived problems with Traditionalism. My medium conclusion is that this modified Traditionalism deals with the problem of dualism more successfully than Annihilationism. This may provide an even stronger reason for annihilationists to accept it, if dualism has been one of their major objections to Traditionalism. I will also suggest that these modifications offer a further mitigation of the severity of the classic traditionalist hell, and thus a further response to the charge of excessive severity examined in the previous chapter. My maximal argument is that this

⁴⁷⁹ The aspect of Blocher's thesis I called 'fixity' and examined in the previous chapter is independent of those examined in this chapter, and thus could be rejected without requiring the rejection of those I am examining

modified Traditionalism is, on a variety of other additional grounds, a better doctrine of hell, and should be accepted by all traditionalists and annihilationists in the debate.

I will distinguish three related elements in Blocher's own argument, further to his argument for fixity examined in the previous chapter. Blocher does not divide the points in this fashion, having a continuous exposition of his position, but I think that this imposed division will help to clarify the different issues involved, even if it necessitates some overlap. The three elements are, first, the damned don't sin; second, the damned are lucid; and third, the damned are reconciled to God. I will suggest that the first and third steps in particular deal with the problem of excessive dualism: the first step better than classic Traditionalism; the third step better than Annihilationism. The second element is not only an important step for establishing a less dualistic doctrine of hell, but also in establishing a more just one, since I will argue that lucidity is also an essential element for a punishment to be just.

3.5.1 The Damned Do Not Sin

First, and foundational, to Blocher's position and the modified Traditionalism I want to present is the thesis that "The main fact about everlasting punishment, the fate of the reprobate, is this: sin shall be no more."⁴⁸⁰ This and the following elements are linked, particularly with the thesis that the damned are lucid but, as I have noted above, I will treat them separately, while recognising that they make something of a cumulative case.

Although Blocher offers some arguments for and against the 'no sin in hell' position he gives little exposition of it and little account of the extent of the alternative positions in the debate. Therefore I will begin this section by noting two important distinctions in the tradition, which Blocher doesn't note. I will then offer an historical survey of the 'no sin in hell' position in the tradition and the mainstream 'continuing sin in hell' position which it is rejecting. Finally I will examine arguments for the modified position. In examining the arguments for and against, I will begin with the points Blocher himself makes, but expand them with the insights of other writers, mainly from the Nineteenth century debate.

here.

⁴⁸⁰ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

3.5.1.1 A Survey of the Debate About Sin in Hell

In this section I want to survey three areas in turn: first, writers who have held that there is continuing sin in hell; second, writers who have held that there is an end to sin in hell; and third, the positions annihilationists have taken. I will conclude that the mainstream position has been that the damned continue to sin in hell, and that the only period when this was widely questioned was in the second half of the Nineteenth century.

An indication of the widespread belief in the continuation of sin in the tradition is suggested by the title of Leckie's chapter surveying Traditionalism: "Everlasting Evil (Dualistic Solution)". It is striking that Leckie not only points out the prominence of continuing sin in the tradition, but also what he perceives as the major problem with it, which I am dealing with in this chapter: dualism. However, in charting the complexities of the traditionalist position on the continuation of sin in hell, it is important to note two distinctions in the tradition. The first distinction is between the punishment of continuing sin as the primary and as a secondary argument for a traditionalist hell. The widespread debate about this issue, at least in the nineteenth century when this issue was last prominent, is indicated by Leckie who puts it first in a list of important and unresolved questions regarding hell:

We cannot find agreement among orthodox thinkers regarding some of the most important questions, as, for instance, these: Is eternal punishment the just penalty of a sinful life, or is it said, rather, that men will suffer always because they always continue to sin?⁴⁸¹

The primary argument is that continuing sin is a justification, or even the sole justification, for the unending hell of Traditionalism. On this view, hell is unending because sin is unending. If this is held as the sole justification for Traditionalism, then this permits the view that all sins are deserving of finite punishment, and thus greatly eases the problem of the justice of infinite punishment. In this primary form this is widely recognised as a strong argument for Traditionalism. D.P. Walker states that "one of the easiest and most obvious justifications of eternal torment is to suppose that the damned continue freely to sin and therefore to be justly punished."⁴⁸² In the recent debate John Stott asks: "Would there not be a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and

⁴⁸¹ Leckie, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁴⁸² Walker *op. cit.*, p. 24.

torment consciously experienced throughout eternity?"⁴⁸³ The answer he gives is positive, but he notes this one qualification: "unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity."⁴⁸⁴ In other words, if sinners do continue to sin then this would be possible justification for an unending hell. Blocher writes of "the idea that sinners, such being the power of their freedom, will persevere in hatred against God, for ever and ever." He then comments that amongst traditionalists, "Here lies the strongest rationale of hell."⁴⁸⁵

Where continuing sin in hell is held as a secondary argument, it is held along with the classic traditionalist justification for hell, which Blocher refers to as the apology from "the infinite gravity of sin."⁴⁸⁶ To recap from the last chapter, this may be summarised as follows: in sinning in this life against an infinite Being we deserve an infinite punishment. Since in Hell the damned can only suffer as finite beings their punishment must thus be infinite in duration. Thus the doctrine of continuing sin could logically be removed without destroying the classic case for Traditionalism. In other words, such secondary justifications are logically superfluous for the justification of Traditionalism. On the other hand, if the argument for continuing sin is adopted as a primary argument for Traditionalism then this must involve a *rejection* of the classic traditionalist argument that sin committed in this life deserves an unending punishment. I have limited my definition of Traditionalism as holding to an unending hell as punishment for sins committed in *this* life, and in this I am following the usage in the evangelical debate. I have therefore excluded the continuation of sin as the primary argument for an unending hell. Thus most evangelical traditionalists hold to the continuation of sin in its secondary form.

Thus, many traditionalists give at least two types of justification for an unending hell: first, the 'classic' traditionalist argument; second, the argument from the continued sin of the damned. Examples of writers who use these arguments in this secondary sense are legion.

⁴⁸³ Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁴⁸⁵ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 296. Blocher himself goes on to reject this rationale, while sharing a traditionalist view of hell, as I will show below. It is striking that Kvanvig fails to note this important distinction in his taxonomy of positions on hell. The continuous sin position holds that hell is based upon retribution, but Kvanvig has defined the "Retributive Thesis" as about "punishment to those whose *earthly* lives and behaviour warrant it." [Kvanvig, *op. cit.*, p. 19. [Italics mine.]]

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

One example is Shedd, who is also careful to establish that the endlessness of sin is a secondary argument.

In the second place, endless punishment is rational, because of the endlessness of sin. If the preceding view of the relation of penalty to guilt be correct, endless punishment is just, without bringing the sin of the future world into the account... But while this is so, it is a fact to be observed, that sin is actually being added to sin, in the future life, and the amount of guilt is accumulating.⁴⁸⁷

Shedd places what I have called the *classic* traditionalist argument third: "In the third place, endless punishment is rational, because sin is an infinite evil; infinite not because committed by an infinite being, but against one."⁴⁸⁸ Hodge is another example, and he carefully avoids the problem of confusing the argument from endless sin in its primary and secondary forms. After a discussion of the classic traditionalist argument he notes,

Relief on this subject is sought from the consideration that as the lost continue to sin forever they may justly be punished forever. To this, however, it is answered that the retributions of eternity are threatened for the sins done in the body. This is true; nevertheless, it is also true, first, that sin in its nature is alienation and separation from God; and as God is the source of all holiness and happiness, separation from Him is of necessity the forfeiture of all good; secondly, that this separation is from its nature final and consequently involves endless misery.⁴⁸⁹

One of the clearest statements is from Constable, an annihilationist, who William Reid notes and comments upon in a chapter entitled 'Endless Punishment and Endless Sinning'. Reid is critical of the use of continuing sin as a primary argument, but is clear that it can be used as a secondary argument:

The objection has been expressed thus - "If we cannot defend man's future treatment as being a just reward for his present conduct, we cannot justify it at all. It is a piece of the coolest effrontery for us to present as a reason for God's conduct what God has not Himself presented when explaining to man His judicial conduct. Just fancy an earthly judge sentencing a criminal to a punishment too severe for the offence committed, and then gravely justifying the sentence by the observation that the criminal would be sure to deserve it all by his conduct in jail! Yet such is the judicature, unworthy of a Jeffreys, which learned professors of theology and doctors of divinity ascribe to the Judge of the whole earth!"⁴⁹⁰

So argues the Prebendary of Cork, and the argument is sound. We believe equally with him, that "the punishment of the future is for the sins of the present," and we have unequivocally taken this ground in treating of the demerit of sin. But in addition to this, and in confirmation of our position, we may surely hold, that as God is under no obligation to convert and sanctify a sinner, there can be no injustice in punishing him so long as he sins...⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁷ Shedd, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴⁸⁹ Hodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 878-9.

⁴⁹⁰ Constable, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁹¹ William Reid, *Everlasting Punishment and Modern Speculation* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1874), pp. 102-103.

A typical example from the recent debate of belief in the continuation of sin as an argument for the continuation of punishment is from Carson.

What is hard to prove, but seems to me probable, is that one reason why the conscious punishment of hell is ongoing is because sin is ongoing...[H]ell's inmates are full of sin. They hate and attract retribution, they still love only themselves and attract retribution, they are neither capable of nor desirous of repenting, and attract retribution. As dark as these reflections are, I suspect they go a long way to providing a rationale for the eternal nature of hell and its torments.⁴⁹²

One striking feature of Carson's discussion is that he judges that this argument from continuing sin is "probable," but "hard to prove."⁴⁹³ It also seems that Carson, by suggesting that continuing sin could provide a rationale for a traditional hell is using this as a primary argument. However, from the above discussion it is apparent that most traditionalists only use continuing sin in hell as a secondary argument, albeit an important one.

The second distinction in the tradition over the continuation of sin refers to the culpability of the sin committed in hell. Different writers argue that the sin committed by the damned in hell may or may not deserve further punishment. Thus, for example, Aquinas, argues that sin in hell does not deserve further punishment, but is a part of the punishment itself.

This subtle nuance is succinctly expressed by Walker:

the damned do continue to commit evil acts, particularly by way of blasphemy; but these acts are due to the obstinate perversity of their will, which is part of their punishment, and do not therefore constitute a demerit ("mala in damnatis non sunt demeritoria, sed pertinent ad damnationis poenam")⁴⁹⁴

Such a view clearly serves to undermine the continuation of sin as a primary argument.

Further, this is not the only view amongst traditionalists and, where an opinion can be discerned, more seem to hold that further sin in hell does indeed deserve further punishment. For some writers this even leads to the notion of the punishment of hell becoming progressively severe as the sin of the damned becomes ever greater. This is

⁴⁹² Carson, *Gagging*, pp.533-4. See also D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), pp. 102-103.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 533.

⁴⁹⁴ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Walker footnotes Aquinas, *op. cit.*, 2a 2ae, q.13, a.4; *Suppl. Q.* 98, a.6. It is noteworthy that part of the argument Aquinas uses has similarities to Blocher's understanding of the fixity of the damned. "For all are agreed that after the judgement day there will be neither merit nor demerit. The reason for this is because merit or demerit is directed to the attainment of some further good or evil: and after the day of judgement good and evil will have reached their ultimate consummation, so that there will no further addition to good or evil. Consequently... evil will in the damned not be a demerit but a punishment only." [*Ibid.*, Q. 98, a.6.]

suggested by Edwards, who is countering the argument that the punishment of the damned will lead to their reform:

[If] they shall go on in such wickedness... how desperately will their guilt be increased! How many thousand times more guilty at the end of the term, than at the beginning! And therefore they will be much more the proper objects of divine severity, deserving God's wrath, and still a thousand times more severe or longer continued chastisements than the past...⁴⁹⁵

On this view hell is dynamic, not in the sense of the damned being able to repent, but in their worsening sin and resultant severer punishment. Shedd also argues that there is a decline into greater sinfulness: "wicked will intensifies itself perpetually. Pride, left to itself, increases and never diminishes. Enmity and hatred become more and more satanic."⁴⁹⁶ Constable writes of this as "a theory which describes eternity as entering down an endless course of increasing sin calling for endlessly increasing punishment."⁴⁹⁷ Garratt also notes a further element of this: 'traditional view' is the deepening mutual corruption of the damned, "... the contamination of those less depraved by association with those more depraved, and a seething mass of corruption becoming worse and worse to everlasting ages."⁴⁹⁸ By way of conclusion, I will quote Garratt who articulates what he calls "the traditional view."⁴⁹⁹

Peter Lombard was the real author of the traditional view, or at all events it was by him reduced into a system. The doctrine of the Schoolmen as formulated in his *Summa Theologiae* was this, that punishment and sin will both go on for ever, the punishment having no corrective power, and in consequence of continued sin continually increasing;...⁵⁰⁰

I now turn to my second task, to survey the 'no sin' position in the tradition. The tradition for the continuation of sin in hell is strong, and certainly qualifies as the mainstream tradition, and the 'no sin' position might seem to be a relatively rare one. However, Blocher, who adopts a 'no sin' position, suggests that the view of a uniform tradition of continuing sin in hell may be a distortion, and that his own position "may be *nearer* to older orthodoxy than nineteenth and twentieth century emphases."⁵⁰¹ Blocher claims that neither Augustine nor Calvin may have held that sin continued in hell. Blocher's main witness from the tradition is Augustine:

⁴⁹⁵ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 518.

⁴⁹⁶ Shedd, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁴⁹⁷ Constable, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴⁹⁹ Garratt, *World*, p. 197.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5, footnoting Peter Lombard, *Sentent. Lib. Iv.*, Distinct. 1.

Speaking of the final division between the Two Cities, the two categories of people, [Augustine] writes: 'The former shall have no longer any desire, the latter any ability, to sin.'... Whether the total absence of any *facultas peccandi* amounts, for him, to agreement with God, to reconciliation in the sense of Colossians 1:20, is not clear. But we would claim that it is logically entailed: for a man to disagree with God is to sin, and to do so anew at every moment; Saint Augustine has discerned that it cannot be any more, the *facultas [peccandi]* is no longer there.⁵⁰² Leckie draws a similar conclusion about Augustine from a consideration of the following theological bind he believes Augustine's theology drove him into.

If we ask how he could believe that evil had no real existence, and yet that it was certainly immortal, the answer is that he did not affirm the eternity of sin, but only of punishment. It is true that he did not explicitly deny that sin will last for ever. But we do not find in *The City of God* any suggestion that he thought of the future state as one in which men continue in active rebellion against the Most High. The moral history of a man was ended when he was condemned at the Judgement; and eternity was, for him, only a perpetual reaping of the harvest he had sown in this earthly life; it was a state of simple retribution.⁵⁰³

Another surprising advocate of a 'no sin' position is Candlish. The surprise is that Candlish is one of the chief critics of Birks, who is in turn also an advocate of this position. Candlish responds to Birks' own understanding of Candlish's position, stating that "we do not say, as [Birks] would insinuate, that [Candlish's position was] "the purpose of God's government is to stereotype and eternalise active rebellion against God.""⁵⁰⁴ Rather, Candlish claims that he simply doesn't dogmatise about it. He then adds that the whole notion of rebellion is a false import.

Some rash and rude religious terrorists, borrowing from the Church of Rome, and importing into Protestant teaching orally, the horrid sight exhibited at Antwerp and elsewhere, - let the poets, also, the Italian Dante, and even our own Milton, share the responsibility, - may be quoted as uttering things that should be held to be unutterable, as regards the future destiny of the finally lost. To fasten upon these exceptional instances is unworthy of this Protestant clergyman, and unfair to us who are his fellow Protestants.⁵⁰⁵

Candlish's comments suggest that the continuing sin is not only wrong, seemingly because of the problem of dualism it raises, but also 'exceptional', though influential on

⁵⁰¹ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁵⁰³ Leckie, *op. cit.*, p. 123. The argument here seems to be that because sin leads ultimately to a *natural* extinction, and yet hell is believed to be unending, it implies that there must be no continuing sin.

⁵⁰⁴ Candlish, *Tendencies in Connection with the Doctrine of Future Punishment: Being Principal Candlish's Introductory Lecture at the Opening of the Session 1869-70, in the New College, Edinburgh* (James Nisbet: London, 1870), p. 12.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

Catholics in particular. However, I think that this is to significantly underestimate the influence of the doctrine.

A particularly original form of this view, that holds that hell is unending torment, but that there is an end to sin, was proposed by T.R. Birks. Birks was a prominent Evangelical and successor to F.D. Maurice as Professor of Moral Philosophy at London, and subsequently he held a professorship at Cambridge. Rowell writes of Birks "Although he could not be described as an outstanding scholar, he was definitely to be ranked amongst the leaders of Evangelicalism, and the young Gerard Manley Hopkins could describe him in 1864 as 'almost the only learned Evangelical going'."⁵⁰⁶ Birks' "major statement of his position"⁵⁰⁷ was *The Victory of Divine Goodness*.⁵⁰⁸ I will discuss Birks' position, and that of other writers who hold a similar position such as Langton Clarke and James Orr, below. A brief questioning of the tradition of continuing sin in hell, in the recent debate, is found in Paul Helm's book *The Last Things*. Helm writes:

those in hell recognise hell for what it is and the justice of their being there. Otherwise hell would be a breeding ground for further injustice and resentment, for further sin. For although hell is a place of sinners, there is no reason to think that it is a heaven for sinners, a fools' paradise... So hell is a place of pain, but not of defiance or resistance.⁵⁰⁹

Third, I turn to the views of annihilationists on the issue of continuing sin in hell. Fudge is unusual in addressing this issue. He does so by drawing on the arguments of Constable from the nineteenth century, which I have noted above.

Henry Constable responded to this type of argument [for the continuation of sin] by pointing out that (1) Scripture never suggests any such idea as sin in hell but (2) specifically states over and over that future punishment is for deeds "done in the body" during the present life in this age. "Just fancy an earthly judge sentencing a criminal to a punishment too severe for the offence committed, and then gravely justifying his sentence by the observation the criminal would be sure to deserve it all by his conduct in gaol!"⁵¹⁰

Constable's analogy in the final sentence, also quoted by Reid above, only serves as an argument against the primary form of the continuing sin argument, which is not the way that it is stated by most traditionalists, even if it does sometimes seem to function as a

⁵⁰⁶ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 124, quoting from C.C. Abbott (ed.), *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 1956, p. 18 (6 June 1864). Rowell discusses Birks over several pages (pp. 123-129).

⁵⁰⁷ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵⁰⁸ Birks, *op. cit.*.

⁵⁰⁹ Helm, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁵¹⁰ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 181, n. 57, quoting Constable, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-109. Quotation on p. 109.

primary argument as a way of avoiding the problem of justifying unending punishment for sin committed in this life. However, Constable's arguments would undermine the argument in either form. Thus Fudge, following Constable, ends up taking a position similar to Blocher at this point. One might have expected all annihilationists to be clearly in favour of the notion of an end to sin, since the continuation of culpable sin in hell is an obvious argument for Traditionalism, as Stott recognises. Put the other way, Annihilationism necessarily excludes the notion of continuing sin in hell for which the sinner deserves further punishment, unless it is argued that extinction was the punishment for some or all sins committed in hell. However no one argues this.

3.5.1.2 Arguments for the 'Continuing Sin' Position

Having briefly surveyed the debate about sin in hell in the tradition, in this section I will first examine the arguments for and against the continuing sin position. It is necessary to establish that the 'no sin in hell' position is at least reasonable, in order to offer this form of modified Traditionalism as a more adequate response to the annihilationist charge of excessive dualism. In fact I will argue that the 'no sin' position is not just reasonable, but should be accepted, on the basis of the arguments in favour of it.

In turning to the arguments *for* the continuing sin position, Blocher notes several and responds to them. As well as noting these, I will expand on them, and also add other additional reasons, as well as my own response. The first reason Blocher gives, and with no further exposition, is that "Psychological considerations on habit and hardening eclipse all other arguments."⁵¹¹ His point seems to be that without the intervention of Divine grace the damned have no power to change their habitual sinfulness which they exhibited on earth. Therefore they will continue to sin, because there has been nothing to change them or prevent them. Blocher cites no examples, but one such is Shedd:

Another reason for the endlessness of sin is the bondage of the sinful will... a man is not forced to sin, but if he does, he cannot of himself get back to where he was before sinning... The effect of vicious habit in diminishing man's ability to resist temptation is proverbial... The culmination of this bondage is seen in the next life... the guilty free agent reaches that dreadful condition where resistance to evil ceases altogether, and surrender to evil becomes demonical.⁵¹²

⁵¹¹ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

⁵¹² Shedd, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-150.

Another example is Strong:

Upon the correct view of the will which we have advocated,... the sinful soul, in its very sinning, gives to itself a sinful bent of intellect, affection, and will; in other words, makes for itself a character, which, though it does not render necessary, yet does render certain, apart from divine grace, the continuance of sinful action."⁵¹³

Again, "habit begets fixity of character, and in the spiritual world sinful acts, often repeated, produce a permanent state of sin, which the soul, unaided, cannot change."⁵¹⁴

In response I would note that the Last Judgement may provide just such a moment of intervention, even if not of grace, to break the pattern of sin. This is certainly what Blocher argues below.

Second, Blocher notes A.H. Strong's only exegetical support for the position is his use of Mark 3:29, 'he is guilty of an eternal sin,' but states that "it is easy to understand this word as guilt remaining, not as sin being constantly reproduced"⁵¹⁵ Blocher concludes that "the thesis of continuing sin is found nowhere in Scripture."⁵¹⁶

Third, Blocher notes a theological reason given by Hodge, which is drawn from the damned's alienation and separation from God. Since "God is the source of all holiness and happiness, separation from Him is of necessity the forfeiture of all good," which entails sinfulness.⁵¹⁷ Blocher own response is that,

This reasoning, however, is not strictly conclusive. It does not take into account the complexity of 'separation'; orthodoxy has to maintain that the lost, in the final state, still depend metaphysically on God, and have in him their being if they are to exist at all. Even in life, we say they are separated from God, 'without God in the world,' and, yet, the very energy of their sinning, at every instant is given them by God.

Hodge's logic, then, does not envisage the possibility of *another* relationship to God, in judgement, that will exclude both fellowship and active sinfulness...⁵¹⁸

I would also add that Hodge's argument, as stated, achieves too much. If existence is a good, and all good is forfeited at the judgment of separation, then this would mean the loss of existence.

⁵¹³ Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 1041.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1049.

⁵¹⁵ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 302. Although I am not addressing exegetical issues in this thesis, it is interesting to note that in the nineteenth century debate there are only three passages that are quoted frequently to argue for ongoing sin in hell: Luke 16:23-28; Revelation 20:7-8 and 22:11. Carson, in a brief comment on Blocher's thesis, also quotes Revelation 20:10-11 as a reason for rejecting the position, and adds Revelation 16:21. [Carson, *Gagging*, p. 533].

⁵¹⁷ Charles Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 879. Quoted in Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁵¹⁸ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 302. [Italics original.]

Fourth, a further objection, which Blocher doesn't mention, is that sin has only truly ceased if the damned have repented, since the failure to repent is itself a sin. However, if the damned have repented then they should be forgiven and taken to heaven, in which case Blocher's position collapses into Universalism. In response, I would argue that failure to repent is only a new sin if repentance remains a command of God with the concomitant ability of the damned to fulfil it. However, as I argued in the previous chapter when discussing fixity, death and the Last Judgement mark the end of the possibility of repentance, and indeed all moral change. Therefore the failure to repent is not a new sin committed by the damned worthy of further punishment. A similar objection is suggested by Carson, who asks: "are we to imagine that the lost in hell love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and their neighbours as themselves? If not, they are breaking the first and second commandments. Are they full of spontaneous worship and praise?"⁵¹⁹ Put more succinctly, Carson is arguing that since the damned are not living perfectly in hell they are therefore guilty of continued sin. However, I would suggest that these are not new acts of sins committed by the damned, but simply the state they are in. Thus, as I will argue at length below when discussing the damned being reconciled, it is conceivable that in hell the damned are capable of pleasing God, and even loving him, as fully as they are then able without doing so in the same way as the blessed. Further, there is a difference here between the position of Carson who is highlighting sin as falling short of perfection, and the tradition I have highlighted where the damned continue to desire to rebel. It is this element of desire to sin which Blocher is primarily rejecting, and it may be that one can agree with Carson about the damned's failure to be perfect, while agreeing with the broader thesis that the damned don't continue to desire to sin.

An unsatisfactory attempt to avoid this objection is made by Constable who argues there is no sin in hell because there is no law in hell.

It may be fairly questioned whether, according to any principles of divine or human law, the lost in hell are capable of sinning. We deny that they are. "Sin is the transgression of the law," St. John tells us; and Paul lays down this great principle of equity, "Where no law is, there is no transgression."⁵²⁰ We deny that those who are denied all the benefits of law, and subjected to its greatest and final penalty, are ever considered as under the law, or capable of incurring any fresh

⁵¹⁹ Carson, *Gagging*, p. 534.

⁵²⁰ 1 John 3:4; Romans 4:15.

guilt for its infraction... In a word, as the saved will be raised above the possibility of sinning; so the lost will be sunk below it.⁵²¹

However, I think that a lawless hell increases the problems of the justice of hell, and the dualism of hell, since the damned can defy God with impunity. William Reid, in the nineteenth century debate, devotes a whole chapter (of 8 pages), entitled "Endless Punishment and Endless Sinning", to critique the notion of an end to sin, which he examines in the form articulated by Constable. He comments on this argument and asks a series of questions, rightly expecting a negative answer.

But are [the damned] really "out of and beyond all law?" When devils disowned their allegiance, did they escape from their responsibility? Souls in hell, are under the same obligation to love God, that are souls in heaven; and the one are still as certainly as are the other, the subjects of moral government. Will any pretend that God cannot maintain a moral government in hell?⁵²²

Fifth, Reid uses the parallel between the damned and demons to argue that there is sin in hell: "The doings of demoniacs recorded in the Gospels, the doings of the arch-spirit of evil, show that sin extends its deceitfulness and malignity even to hell itself."⁵²³ This argument from the sin of demons in hell is his main criticism, which he repeats several times. My response to Reid's argument is that it overlooks the fact that the present punishment of the demons is only provisional, and they will face a further punishment after the Last Judgement. Therefore, even if the demons do provide an analogy to the state of humans in hell, the analogy should be with the demons in their final state. In that final state I think that Blocher's argument about Divine patience, below, would apply equally to the demons as to humans: that the permission of sin in this life does not mean that it will be extended into eternity. Reid explicitly denies this, but I think that his case is unconvincing, being more of a statement than an argument:

Now, we are aware of no ground on which to conclude that it will be different in the future. Death is not a moral, but a physical change... Are we, then, to expect a reverse of our nature - an entire change in His method of dealing with us, when we have passed into the spiritual world? It would be as reasonable to expect a revolution in the Divine moral administration.⁵²⁴

However, there will be such a significant change at the Last Judgment. I conclude that the arguments for continuing sin in hell are not compelling.

⁵²¹ Constable, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5.

⁵²² Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁵²³ Reid, *op. cit.*, pp. 104, 105, 109.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

3.5.1.3 Arguments for the Modified Position

Having discussed arguments for the continuation of sin in hell, Blocher offers several counter arguments in justification of his own position that there is no sin in hell, although they are somewhat interspersed with other points over several pages. (Some of these points, such as the damned being lucid, I will examine further under subsequent headings, although Blocher rightly believes that they also contribute to his case for an end to sin in hell.) First, in Scripture, "the punishment [of hell] refers only to 'things done through the body' (2 Cor. 5:10)... It is the harvest of the seeds of this life."⁵²⁵ Given the distinctions which I have made, it is clear that this argument doesn't necessarily stand against all the positions holding to the continuity of sin. It certainly counters continuous sin as a primary argument, and as a secondary argument where sin is culpable, but not necessarily the Aquinian position that sin in hell is not culpable. However, since no traditionalist in the current debate makes such a distinction, Blocher's point does stand against classic Traditionalism in its present form.

Second, Blocher argues from the Biblical imagery of 'fire' and the 'worm of remorse'. He interprets these images metaphorically of the state of the damned in scripture and concludes that

This means agreement with God in his reprobation of their behaviour... The main Biblical expressions, then, may refer to the reaction of the moral creature, no longer able to sin, when he or she becomes at last *lucid*... full knowledge in self-
abhorrence, condemnation, remorse.⁵²⁶

Blocher doesn't explain why the damned would not be able to sin when they are lucid, but presumably his argument would be that they would see clearly the awfulness and consequences of sin so as not to be rationally able to choose to sin.⁵²⁷ It could be responded that sin is never chosen rationally, and thus lucidity may not prevent further sin, but this is to overlook the purpose of the Last Judgement to force sinners to see sin for what it truly is. However, I will argue that the damned are not actually free to sin, even if they desired. I will examine this point further below under The Damned are Lucid .

⁵²⁵ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁵²⁷ This is a disputed point, but Tony Gray supports the notion that a person cannot freely and rationally choose hell, once its nature is clear, where hell is understood to be a place of continuing sin. See Tony Gray, "Post-Mortem Evangelism: A Response to R.R. Cook," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 46/1 (1995).

Third, Blocher argues from what he calls "the weightiest *datum* of all. The theory of sin forever flourishing ignores the message of Christ's perfect victory over sin and all evil." (I will examine this below under The Damned are Reconciled.)

Fourth, Blocher argues from the idea of divine patience, which he presents as "confirmation" of this position.

Would it be normal for God to allow for sin to go on for ever since he allows it now? That logic appears to by-pass entirely the Biblical theme of divine *patience*. Is not the point that God tolerates at present what he will *no longer* when his patience comes to an end?⁵²⁸

Further, "what is abnormal, incredible, is not that God should suppress sin - rather, that he should not do so immediately!... When the time of patience falls due, sin can be no more."⁵²⁹ Thus Blocher concludes that "the main axes of the eschatological vision unfolded in Scripture, encourage us boldly to profess this assurance."⁵³⁰ Thus Blocher believes that the position can be affirmed with a high degree of confidence. Birks makes a very similar argument to Blocher's, based on the notion of God's forbearance:

[I]t is not strange, but natural and certain, that sinners should have far less freedom for active wickedness under the revealed and fiery anger of God, than in the times of forbearance and long-suffering. The strange notion is, that under the holy eye and righteous hand of their Judge, they can still rebel even more freely and fiercely than before.⁵³¹

Fifth, Blocher raises the very issue of dualism which has prompted this discussion.

Blocher states: "The difficulty [of explaining evil] doubles when continuance in sin becomes cardinal in the fate of the lost."⁵³²

Sixth, Blocher challenges the coherence of the traditional view: "There is a fatal tension in the thesis under scrutiny: for it affirms both the extreme of vicious rebellion and the sinner's approval of [God's] judgement as just."⁵³³ I will develop this point, that the damned need to acknowledge judgement as just, further in the following section on

⁵²⁸ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

⁵³¹ Birks, *Victory*, p. 249.

⁵³² Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

lucidity. Blocher is rightly assuming that if the damned continue to sin they do not approve of the justice of their judgement.

Seventh, Blocher's notion of fixity, which I examined in the previous chapter, may also bear on this issue, although he does not make a link. As I have shown, Blocher analyses the biblical idea of death and concludes with a contrast: "[Life] is ability to act and to project, life is sharing in exchanges; total death is isolation, paralysis, non-renewal, that is *fixity*, absolute fixity."⁵³⁴ It may be that this state of fixity includes the inability to sin, because sin itself requires a continuing moral life, in which sin can be committed. This notion certainly rules out the idea of the decline of the damned in hell into greater sinfulness and severer punishment.

I would also note an additional argument used in the nineteenth century debate. Thus, eighth, Birks argues that an end to sin is required for the punishment of hell to be complete. He writes,

this punishment will be complete, not incomplete; so as not merely to confine from without, but to subdue and crush the rebellious will under the mighty power of God, revealed in judgement; so that there will be, and can be, no eternal reign of Satan, and no power of active mutual torment on the part of men and angels, under this condemnation.⁵³⁵

Again, this also relates to the issue of lucidity, which I examine below, since for a punishment to be just I will argue that it is necessary for it to be recognised as just by the one punished, and in that sense must be internalised by the damned.

I now turn to some of the implications of accepting Blocher's thesis. First, the great strength of this view is that it helps to overcome the charge against Traditionalism of dualism. Blocher develops his thesis primarily as a response to this problem of dualism which, like many annihilationists, he believes is implicit within the usual formulations of the traditionalist position. Birks, who, as I have noted, holds a view similar to Blocher's, writes that his view stands in "contrast to the medieval superstition, which assigns to Satan a rival empire to God's own dominion for evermore."⁵³⁶ It is this problem of there seeming to be a rival empire for eternity which is central to the charge of P.E. Hughes and others,

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

⁵³⁵ Birks, *Victory*, p. 229.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

and which this position avoids, although I will need to examine the other elements of Blocher's position to gain a fuller picture of what this final state would be like. Second, Blocher's thesis removes an argument against Annihilationism, and for Traditionalism. Carson, as I have noted above, argues that continuing sin greatly weakens the argument for Annihilationism,⁵³⁷ while Stott suggests it is a possible justification for Traditionalism.⁵³⁸ Although several of these points require further discussion later in this chapter, I would conclude in the light of that fuller discussion, that Blocher's argument at this point is strong and therefore persuasive.

3.5.2 The Damned Are Lucid

I now turn to a second element of Blocher's thesis: that the damned will be 'lucid', by which Blocher means that they are fully aware of the justice of their punishment. While Blocher doesn't draw this as a separate conclusion, it does serve as a premise for the notion of 'reconciliation' which I will examine in the next section. The link is that if the damned realise the nature of their sin against God and the justice of his judgement and punishment of them, it is a short step to argue that they praise God for his justice, which is a central feature of reconciliation as Blocher understands it. Blocher writes: "... all creatures will share in God's abhorrence; the lost will be ashamed, theirs will be the ultimate 'confusion of face', as they shall be unable to escape the truth of their past actions."⁵³⁹ As I noted above, summarising a discussion about the biblical language of "fire" and the "worm of remorse," Blocher comments,

The main Biblical expressions, then, may refer to the reaction of the moral creature, no longer able to sin, when he or she becomes at last *lucid*. Then, impenitent sinners appreciate the value of their lives and see them as they are, under God's reprobation."⁵⁴⁰ Again: "... sinners ultimately glorify God... And they know it, since they now see the truth of their lives; they see their evil works - which they now abhor - as included in God's plan, by his permissive will, and used for his purposes... their thought is fixed in the knowledge that, through their very deprivation, they glorify God and agree with him."⁵⁴¹

Blocher thus argues that the damned will not remain deluded or successful in their rebellion.

⁵³⁷ Carson, *How Long*, p. 103.

⁵³⁸ Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁵³⁹ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

In the tradition lucidity is also widely held. Shedd notes:

The sinner's own conscience will "bear witness" and approve of the condemning sentence, "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Rom. 2:16)... Accordingly, all the evangelical creeds say with the Westminster Larger Catechism (89) that "the wicked, upon clear evidence and full conviction of their own consciences, shall have the just sentence of condemnation pronounced against them."⁵⁴²

Jonathan Edwards argues that those in hell will have a keener sense of the glories of God than those on earth.

Multitudes that are now in hell, will have ideas of the external glory that pertains to things heavenly, far beyond whatever any have in this world. They will see all that external glory and beauty, in which Christ will appear at the day of judgement, when the sun will be turned into darkness before him; which, doubtless, will be ten thousand times greater than ever was impressed on the imagination of either saints or sinners in the present state, or ever was conceived by any mortal man.⁵⁴³

More recently, Peter Toon has written:

This loss of heaven will be most tormenting because their understandings will be cleared to know their loss, their consciences will make them fully aware of their guilt, and their affections will be no longer be stupefied. The memory of their past lives and how they offended God will ever be before them and they will fully recognise the enormity of their sin.⁵⁴⁴

The chief argument in favour of this position is, I believe, that it establishes the justice of the punishment of the damned. If retributive punishment is to be just then the one punished must be aware and convinced that their actions are deserving of the punishment they are given. Thus Blamires argues: "... if punishment is effective it makes the punished one aware of why he is being punished, and what it is he is being paid for."⁵⁴⁵ This argument seems to be the primary reason why the tradition also holds to the lucidity of the damned. Thus, for example, Jonathan Edwards makes a similar point when he writes,

It is agreeable both to Scripture and reason to suppose, that the wicked will be punished in such a manner, that they shall be sensible of the punishment they are under;... They should know themselves that justice takes place upon them; that God vindicates that majesty which they despised; that God is not so despicable a being as they thought him to be.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴² Shedd, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁵⁴³ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 46.

⁵⁴⁴ Toon, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁵⁴⁵ Blamires, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁵⁴⁶ Edwards, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 84.

The legal principle on which this is based is stated by Aquinas: "in every judicial hearing, the witness, the accuser, and the defendant need to be acquainted with the matter on which judgement has to be pronounced."⁵⁴⁷ Aquinas believes that this principle is so important that he goes to great lengths to establish that the damned are able to be so acquainted with their sin. Thus, in response to the objection that "It seems that after the resurrection everyone will not be able to know all the sins he has committed,"⁵⁴⁸ Aquinas proposes a temporary supernatural increase of the powers of the damned. He begins his reply with a reference to Augustine. "On the contrary, Augustine says (De Civ. Dei, xx) that a kind of Divine energy will come to our aid, so that we shall recall all of our sins to mind."⁵⁴⁹ Later, when discussing whether all merits and demerits will be seen in an instant, Aquinas writes: "But with regard to the damned, a difficulty presents itself, since their intellect is not raised so that they can see God and all else in Him." Aquinas accepts that the lucidity of the damned is less than that of the righteous, but in order to establish the notion that the damned are adequately lucid about their sin, he argues that while the damned do not see in an instant, as the righteous do, they do see very rapidly with supernatural assistance: "[T]hey will consider each sin not instantaneously, but in a very short time, the Divine power coming to their aid."⁵⁵⁰

However, it is arguable that in order to understand sin it is not simply a case of bare cognition but also of some degree of moral commitment. Thus, in order to understand sin, which is ultimately an offence against God, conscience must play a role. This is precisely what Dale argues. Dale is clear that only a moral being can conceive of punishment. "[A sinner] certainly cannot be made to feel that he is being punished except through his conscience. It is through his conscience that he belongs to the moral world and can conceive such an idea as that of punishment;..."⁵⁵¹ Dale also links this idea to the doctrine of hell when he states that, "something tells us that we ought to suffer for what we have done. When joined with the inklings of God's displeasure, this

⁵⁴⁷ Aquinas, *op. cit.*, Q. 87, Art. 1. However there are limitations to this knowledge, since Aquinas argues that the damned cannot *see* God, understood as the Beatific Vision, because to do so would necessarily bring joy. [*Ibid.*, Q. 90, Art. 3.]

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Q. 87, Art. 1, Obj. 1.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Q. 87, Art. 1, Obj. 1.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Q. 87, Art. 3.

⁵⁵¹ R.W. Dale, *The Atonement* (7th ed., London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1895), p. 215.

sense of things is the start of hell."⁵⁵² Dale also explains the problem for conscience that sin brings:

Sin is invariably followed by a deterioration of our moral and spiritual nature... By wrongdoing we become less able to discriminate between good and evil, and those forces of our nature which refuse to listen to the voice of duty are strengthened in their revolt; the sensibility of conscience is diminished, and the authority of conscience is impaired.⁵⁵³

Therefore if the damned are to be able to understand sin truly they must cease sinning.

However, Blocher notes that traditionalists such as Shedd also hold that the damned continue to sin in hell, as indeed do each of the writers quoted above. Blocher objects,

There is a fatal tension in the thesis under scrutiny: for it affirms both the extreme of vicious rebellion and the sinner's approval of his judgement as just. How can Shedd both write: 'It is pure wickedness, without regret or sorrow'⁵⁵⁴ and 'The sinner's own conscience will "bear witness" and approve of the condemning sentence,' as the Westminster Larger Catechism specifies, 'upon evidence and full conviction of their consciences'?⁵⁵⁵ Conscience is the man conscious! Conscience would be suppressed by total sin! It is not possible to associate them, as Shedd suggests, as 'brimstone and fire'.⁵⁵⁶⁵⁵⁷

To note just one other example, which raises the related issue of sanity, Packer writes of

"The words used by theologians, on the basis of Scripture, to describe hell - ...

introversion to the point of idiocy..."⁵⁵⁸ I think that Blocher's criticism of tradition at this point is valid, as far as it goes. However Blocher slightly simplifies the tradition at this point, and therefore to more securely establish this argument I will add an extra step to it. Blocher has failed to note that the tradition tends to introduce a chronological distinction between the two states of lucidity and continuing sin: the damned are forced to be lucid at the Last Judgement, but are then thrown into hell where they continue in sin in 'pure wickedness, without regret or sorrow'. Therefore Blocher needs to argue in two steps to establish his criticism, the second being the additional one. First, the damned cannot both sin and recognise the justice of their judgement. This is recognised by the tradition when it argues for special conditions to prevail at the Last Judgement to enable the damned to apprehend, and presumably accept, the full extent of their sin and the justice of their

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

⁵⁵⁴ Shedd, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵⁵⁷ Blocher, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-3.

⁵⁵⁸ J.I. Packer, *Knowing Christianity* (Guildford: Eagle, 1995), p.186. The words are taken from Packer, *Problem, op. cit.*, p.14.

judgement. Second, it is necessary for the damned to continue to apprehend and accept the justice of their judgement, and therefore they can not change their state after the Last Judgement and begin to sin again. The requirement for this continued acceptance of the justice of their punishment could be argued in various ways. First, one could argue simply that the required conditions for a just punishment remain equally valid through the length of the punishment. Two illustrations exemplify this. If someone is punished by imprisonment, and accepts the justice of their sentence, but then under the strain of the punishment goes mad and begins to imagine that they are actually in a pleasurable state, it would be reasonable to conclude that the punishment was no longer effective *qua* punishment.⁵⁵⁹ Second, someone might be imprisoned for manslaughter after someone died due to their negligence. However, if during their punishment they came to believe that in fact the death had not been their fault, they would begin to view the punishment very differently, no longer as just but unjust. Again, one could conclude that the punishment was no longer effective as retributive punishment because the prisoner no longer accepted the justice of their punishment. Thus, in both cases, the effectiveness of the retributive punishment changes if the initial conditions of the one punished are not maintained. A second argument for the continued acceptance of the justice of their punishment is that the rejection of the justice of God's judgement is to impugn his goodness, and is therefore sin. However, if the damned do not continue to sin, then they cannot so sin! A third argument is that the change from lucidity to sin in the tradition assumes that the damned are able to change after the Last Judgement. Any such change is ruled out if one accepts the arguments for the fixity of the damned.

However, even if Blocher's response to Shedd's argument for some sort of lucidity and *total* sin is held to be successful, this may not mean that he has established that justice is irreconcilable with any sin at all. Shedd holds that the damned become increasingly more sinful in hell until they end up in a state of "pure wickedness." It could thus be argued that even if "Conscience would be suppressed by *total* sin" and "*pure* wickedness" it need not

⁵⁵⁹ Here I disagree with Chan who counters a similar argument based upon the preference of the damned: "Pinnock and Stott may well argue that if people choose to go to hell, they could not properly be said to be punished. Can a prisoner be said to be punished if he enjoys being in prison? But this confuses the psychological state which accompanies punishment with the objectivity of the penalty itself. To be shut out of the totally real is an objective punishment, even when the shutting out is freely chosen. Reality will judge that person as existing in a pathetic state even if he may not think so." [Chan, *art. cit.*, p. 30.] I think that Chan has failed to take account of the need for lucidity for a punishment to be fully retributive.

be so by partial sin. I think that Blocher has chosen an extreme position in Shedd, although one shared by others such as Charles Hodge.⁵⁶⁰ I would argue that not only does the principle hold for this extreme position, but that it also applies for less extreme situations. Thus, the more the damned sin the less they would be able to comprehend the justice of their penalty, and the more partial would be their acknowledgement of the justice of the punishment. Jonathan Edwards mentions three factors established by the lucidity of the damned about their punishment, in the quote above. Each of these three factors would seem to be diminished if the damned continue to sin and thus remain in rebellion against God: they would not consider their punishment totally just; they would not fully acknowledge the majesty of God; and they would think God partially despicable. Further, as I will argue in the next section, it would limit the sense in which the damned could be reconciled with God. Therefore, I would maintain that the most just situation is one in which the damned do not sin.

In turning to assess potential problems with this 'no sin' thesis, I begin with the main reason that this position is rejected in the tradition: because remorse is held to amount to repentance, and repentance would result in salvation. An example of this criticism, that the damned in being lucid about their sin and the justice of its punishment have thereby fulfilled the conditions of penitence which should lead to release, is from Michael Paternoster, for whom this is his chief criticism of T.R. Birks. Paternoster concludes, "Birks has, illogically, turned hell into purgatory and yet maintained its eternity."⁵⁶¹ It is also Ellis' one criticism: "But as an Augustinian-Calvinist, Blocher should recognize that if their remorse is a 'godly sorrow' it is the product of the Holy Spirit in His work of redemption; if only a remorse that they were caught and judged, that remorse continues to be sin."⁵⁶² Blocher responds with two steps that I think are distinct, distinguishing firstly remorse in this life and in the life to come, and secondly remorse and repentance.

But final remorse differs from remorse as it is experienced in life: final remorse will be remorse-in-agreement with God. In life... only *repentance* agrees with God; remorse remains a twisted and truncated apprehension of the truth of one's deeds. Will not, then, final truthful remorse amount to repentance?... the deepest difference between remorse and repentance is this: repentance has a *future*, it enters the open future; remorse relates only to the *past*.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶⁰ See Hodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 877f.

⁵⁶¹ Paternoster, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁵⁶² Ellis in Brower and Elliot, *op. cit.*, p.216, n.79.

⁵⁶³ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 307. [Italics original]

Of course a simple response is to deny that the damned have any freedom of choice in hell, and this is the option that Blocher also takes by arguing for moral 'fixity' in hell. Leckie attributes a similar position to Augustine, and notes a similar response. Augustine faces the additional difficulty in that he believes that the damned have some "essential goodness" in virtue of their mere continued existence:

If, again, we inquire how Augustine could be sure that the lost, while remaining essentially good would yet never repent, the reply is that this conclusion followed from his belief that moral life, in the case of the unregenerate, did not go on beyond the grave. They were destined by the decree of God to enter a condition of spiritual paralysis, and to have no consciousness beyond that of consuming pain, physical and mental. And beings who existed in such a state were, of course, incapable of repentance.⁵⁶⁴

Another difficulty is to determine the degree of moral awareness the damned are capable of. If the righteous are the ones who are most clearly aware of the horror of sin, it raises the question of whether the damned have a true perception. Moberly writes, "The evidence of the saints suggests that realisation of the horror of sin is proportional to holiness... *it is the holy one who suffers*."⁵⁶⁵ Thus the unrighteous are less aware of the horror of sin. This raises the question of whether the punishment of the damned can be fully retributive, because they cannot have a full appreciation of the seriousness of their sin. At least two lines of response are possible. First, the damned can comprehend the justice of their punishment in an adequate though not necessarily total way. An analogy might be that a child may not understand fully why it is wrong to tell lies, but it may still know that it deserves a smack if it does so. Second, the damned could be supernaturally endowed, which is the line Aquinas took, as I noted above. Edwards also writes about such supernatural endowment, which could be adapted for this argument: "Besides, their capacity will probably be enlarged, their understandings will be quicker and stronger in a future state; and God can give them as great a sense and as strong an impression of eternity, as he pleases, to increase their grief and torment."⁵⁶⁶ I would argue that even God cannot give a finite creature a complete "impression of eternity," although it may be that Edwards means that the damned can have an adequate impression, understood as the fullest impression a finite creature is capable of. However the purpose of these quotes is to establish that there is in the tradition an existing argument for the supernatural lucidity of

⁵⁶⁴ Leckie, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵⁶⁵ Moberly, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

⁵⁶⁶ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 88, col. 2.

the damned, and Blocher's thesis could use this. For the defence of Blocher's position it is simply required to make this supernatural endowment permanent rather than temporary.

There are several strengths to Blocher's position. Blocher himself mentions one advantage to do with degrees of punishment:

The model accommodates easily and economically other elements of the doctrine of everlasting punishment: not only the reference to the deeds done through the body (with the harvest metaphor), but also the diversity in degrees (few stripes, many stripes). There can be no proportion more exact to guilt than that of seeing oneself in the light of truth.⁵⁶⁷

However, the greatest strength of this notion of the lucidity of the damned is that it offers a more satisfactory response to the problem of dualism than the continuing sin form of Traditionalism. C.S. Lewis offers an excellent discussion of this issue when he considers an evil man who considers himself righteous. Lewis writes of

... a truly ethical demand that, soon or late, the right should be asserted, the flag planted in this horribly rebellious soul, even if no fuller and better conquest is to follow. In a sense, it is better for the creature itself, even if it never becomes good, that it should know itself a failure, a mistake. Even mercy can hardly wish to such a man his eternal, contented continuance in such ghastly illusion. Thomas Aquinas said of suffering, as Aristotle had said of shame, that it was a thing not good in itself, but a thing which might have a certain goodness in particular circumstances. That is to say, if evil is present, pain at recognition of the evil, being a kind of knowledge, is relatively good; for the alternative is that the soul should be ignorant of the evil, or ignorant that the evil is contrary to its nature, "either of which", says the philosopher, "is manifestly bad". And I think, though we tremble, we agree.⁵⁶⁸

Blamires makes a similar point to Lewis when he argues that love does not want people to be deceived into thinking they are good when they are not.⁵⁶⁹ I think that this argument that evil recognised is a good is correct. Therefore if the damned will not recognise their evil if they continue to sin, they cannot achieve this relative good, and thus the classic traditionalist position is dualistic where Blocher's modified position is not. However, an annihilationist could agree with the value of lucidity and incorporate it into their position, and still claim that their position is a better resolution of the problem of dualism. Indeed I have argued that annihilationists are probably required to reject any notion of continuing sin for which further punishment is deserved. I will argue below

⁵⁶⁷ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

⁵⁶⁸ Lewis, *Problem*, p. 110, quoting Aquinas, *op. cit.*, I, Iiae, Q. 39, Art. I. [Italics Original]. However this his vision does not seem to be as clearly maintained in *The Great Divorce* [London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945], where there does seem to be the continuation of 'ghastly illusions'.

⁵⁶⁹ Blamires, "Eternal Weight," *art. cit.*, p. 6,9.

under the head 'The Reconciliation of the Damned' that Blocher's full position is a better resolution of the problem of dualism than Annihilationism.

I have also argued above that if sin continues in hell then there is no recognition of the full justice of their judgement by the damned, and this itself makes their judgement not fully retributive and therefore unjust. The lucidity of the damned therefore ensures the justice of their judgment. Further, lucidity also serves to emphasise the *poena damni*, the pain of loss and exclusion, since the damned are now more fully aware of what it is they have lost and are excluded from. From this it follows that there is no 'black pleasure'⁵⁷⁰ for them in hell. Also this notion also serves to correct what Harmon rightly judges to be a weakness in the tradition: "The one image which is so terribly neglected in the debate between conditionalists and traditionalists, and which has been inadequately considered in church history, is that of personal exclusion."⁵⁷¹ This discussion also serves to provide an answer to an objection I will encounter more fully in the next section: that such lucidity would reduce the awfulness of hell. One possible aspect of this objection is that, as Aquinas argued and I noted above, to see God is to be blessed, and lucidity involves a clearer vision of God. In response I want to argue that in fact lucidity results in hell being both more and less awful depending on the criteria used. Such a hell will be more awful because the damned will have no escape from the *poena damni*. Edwards, for example, argues that such lucidity about God's holiness and their sinfulness would increase the awfulness of hell. Edwards writes,

Natural conscience is not extinguished in the damned in hell; but on the contrary, remains there in its greatest strength, and is brought to its most perfect exercise; most fully to do its proper office as God's viceregent in the soul, to condemn those rebels against the King of heaven and earth, and manifest God's just wrath and vengeance, and by that means to torment them, and be as a never-dying worm within them. Wretched men find means in this world to blind the eyes and stop the mouth of this viceregent of a sin-revenging God; but they shall not be able to do it always. In another world, the eyes and mouth of conscience will be fully opened. God will hereafter make wicked men to see and know these things from which now they industriously hide their eyes,...⁵⁷²

⁵⁷⁰ Lewis, *Problem*, p. 114.

⁵⁷¹ Harmon, *Case*, pp. 216-217. I disagree with some of Harmon's application of this point. He goes on to argue that "A second aspect of hell to which personal exclusion points is that hell is God's judgment in completely giving over the sinner to himself (the 'depart')." [*Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.] However, this seems to lose the personal element just gained, and that the damned are not able to forget God, but are constantly aware that it is God they are excluded from.

⁵⁷² Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 44. Edwards quotes Isaiah 24:10,11 in support.

This seems to me to be right, that lucidity makes hell more awful for the damned in that they will see clearly the awfulness of their sin. However, it will also be less awful in that they themselves will know the good which Lewis described above, of having truth planted at last in their souls, as they at last see themselves and God more clearly. In this sense it might even be a preferable state to the hell of classic Traditionalism for the damned. Certainly the end to sin and lucidity serve to diminish the seeming pointlessness and thus brutality of classic Traditionalism, with its vision of the rebellious damned raging against God, and thus offers a mitigation of the severity of hell, while making it more truly terrible. I will extend this argument after the next section when I incorporate the notion of the reconciliation of the damned.

In the previous section I noted that if the damned do not continue to sin, then this removes one of the common additional arguments used by many traditionalists for their position.

Here I would note that if the damned are lucid then this may remove another common additional argument used by traditionalists: that the damned desire to be in hell.⁵⁷³ The importance of this argument is noted by Blocher who writes, "Among the modern, the most popular argument, the very soul of most apologies for the possibility of hell, refers to human freedom."⁵⁷⁴ One typical recent example is from Moore, who is a traditionalist:

"[Hell] is a place where God says to men, "Thy will be done." It seems that there is much biblical warrant for Milton's comment that the impenitent would rather "reign in hell than serve in heaven."⁵⁷⁵ An older example is Shedd:

[T]hat endless punishment is reasonable, is proved by the preference of the wicked themselves. The unsubmissive, rebellious, defiant, and impenitent spirit prefers hell to heaven. Milton correctly represents Satan as saying: "All good to me becomes bane, and in heaven much worse would be my state;" and, also, as declaring that "it is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven."⁵⁷⁶

Such arguments from free-will seem to be excluded by the lucidity of the damned that cannot evade the awfulness of hell.

⁵⁷³ The hell that is desired on this argument is the classic traditionalist hell of continuing sin. I will argue in the next section that the damned may indeed desire the reconciliationist hell, but not in order to sin and to avoid God, but in order to be reconciled to him to the degree that they are reconciled to the justice of their punishment.

⁵⁷⁴ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

⁵⁷⁵ Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁵⁷⁶ Shedd, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-4.

In conclusion, in this section I have argued that for retributive punishment to be just, it must be recognised by the one being punished as just. For this condition to be fully met it is necessary for sin and rebellion to have ceased in hell. If sin continues in hell then it would seem that the justice of God's judgement is not fully recognised by those in hell, since they continue in a state of rebellion. Therefore sin must cease for the justice of the punishment to be recognised by the damned, which in turn is necessary for the punishment to be fully retributive.

3.5.3 The Damned Are Reconciled

The third and final element of Blocher's position, as I have expounded it in this chapter, is that the damned are reconciled to God in the limited sense that having acknowledged their sin and the justice of God's judgement, they are to that extent reconciled to him and may even praise him for his justice, while remaining in torment. This is the most speculative of the elements, and it could be rejected while retaining the previous two. However, it is also the most distinctive of the three elements. Blocher writes of it being "a kind of 'reconciliation'",⁵⁷⁷ and therefore I have drawn on this element to name the whole position 'Reconciliationism' in order to aid clarity in my discussion. However, although most proponents in the nineteenth century debate held that it was a distinct fourth view of the state of the damned in hell, I believe that it is best understood as a modified form of Traditionalism. I will argue that this notion of reconciliation builds on the previous section on lucidity: if the damned acknowledge the justice of their judgement, they also acknowledge the justice of the judge, which implies praise for at least this aspect of God's character. I am therefore distinguishing reconciliation from lucidity as being a more positive quality, emphasising the active praise of the damned for God. Bonda asks, "How can the message that all people praise God be explained in such a way that those who are forever lost will share in it? ... Blocher provides a carefully constructed answer."⁵⁷⁸

I will begin by briefly expounding Blocher's position at this point. I will then survey the tradition to determine the degree to which it has held a different position, and then the degree to which it has held a similar position. I will then assess the arguments for and

⁵⁷⁷ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

⁵⁷⁸ Bonda, *op. cit.*, p.227.

against the reconciliation of the damned. As well as being the most distinctive element of the position, reconciliation is also the element which goes furthest to mitigate the Annihilationist charge of dualism against the classic traditionalist position. If the cessation of sin means an end to active rebellion against and hatred of God, then reconciliation means some kind of affirmation by the damned of the justice of God. Such a modified Traditionalism may, I have suggested, serve to diminish the attractiveness of Annihilationism to evangelicals, in so far as they hold it in reaction to the perceived problems of classic Traditionalism. Indeed I will suggest that it offers a better resolution of damnation dualism.

Blocher follows the line of many universalists and some Annihilationists who have argued that the classical traditionalist position has failed to adequately account for the 'universalistic' texts in scripture. Blocher actually calls this "the weightiest *datum* of all," in his case against sin in hell, because "The theory of sin forever flourishing ignores the message of Christ's perfect victory over sin and all evil." Without fully agreeing with the universalists, Blocher comments on texts such as Phil. 2:10f and makes the point that 'every knee shall bow and every tongue confess' includes the damned, and yet "cannot mean mere outward, hypocritical and forced agreement; what sense could there be in any outward show in the light of that Day, when all the secrets shall be exposed (Rom.2:16)."⁵⁷⁹ Turning then to Col.1:20, about God reconciling all things through Christ, he comments that "'Reconciliation' does not imply salvation,... it means the restoration of order, of all within God's order, 'pacification,' as all are brought back into the divinely-ruled harmony. Nothing could be further removed from divine defeat and sin going on after judgement."⁵⁸⁰ Further: "If sinners ultimately glorify God, they do reach in a paradoxical way the *telos* of all creatures as such... their thought is fixed in the knowledge that, through their very deprivation, they glorify God and agree with him."⁵⁸¹

However, this is a relatively rare position in the tradition. It is more common to argue that the damned continue to hate God. A number of quotes could be repeated from the earlier

⁵⁷⁹ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 303. Bonda comments on Blocher's use of these passages, and draws a different conclusion: "reconciliation is the restoration of peace with God through forgiveness of sins - never exclusion from fellowship with God." [Bonda, *op. cit.*, p. 228.]

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

sections where writers argue that the damned continue to sin and refuse to accept their judgement, since the concepts are closely linked. Shedd again is a clear witness:

when in the next life [retribution] is denied, and jeered at; and when in the next life, it is complained of, and resisted, and the arm of hate and defiance is raised against the tribunal; penalty hardens and exasperates. This is impenitence. Such is the temper of Satan; and such is the temper of all who finally become his associates. This explains why there is no repentance in hell, and no meek submission to the Supreme Judge.⁵⁸²

Strong writes of "the misery of the soul which eternally hates God..."⁵⁸³ Blanchard writes that the damned are "even while compelled to acknowledge his glory and goodness, angry at God for condemning them to this fate."⁵⁸⁴ Again, Gerstner describes the unending attitude of the damned as "Resentment, hatred, cursing, and no repentance ever..."⁵⁸⁵

As with the previous elements of Blocher's thesis, this is not without some precedent in the mainstream tradition. Orr in a footnote links this to the notion of lucidity:

Theologians have often spoken of the last judgement as compelling the acknowledgement of God's righteousness in the minds even of the condemned. In this may lie the germ of the ultimate submission to the divine order which the above passages [when God is spoken of as "all in all"] seem to anticipate.⁵⁸⁶

Where Orr argues for 'the acknowledgement of God's righteousness' at the Last Judgment, Blocher is extending this position into the eternity of hell. This position though is rare in the evangelical debate I have been tracing. However, Helm comes close to Blocher's position when he also builds on the notions of an end to sin and of lucidity. He comments on Philippians 2:11:

We are informed that before Christ the Judge every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (*Phil. 2:11*). And this language implies that the impenitent will recognise the essential justice of their plight. For they too recognise Christ's Lordship, and confess him, not with love and adoration as a Saviour, but as their Lord. So hell is a place of pain, but not of defiance or resistance. It is not a demonic colony which has gained unilateral independence from God. Because there is full recognition of God's justice, God's character is vindicated, *and hence glorified*, even by those who in this life have defied him and suffer for it.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸² Shedd, *op. cit.*, p. 151. Shedd gives two lengthy quotes in footnote 47, p. 197, in support of his argument here.

⁵⁸³ Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 1056.

⁵⁸⁴ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁵⁸⁵ Gerstner, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁵⁸⁶ James Orr, *Sin as a Problem of To-Day* (Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1910), p. 318.

⁵⁸⁷ Helm, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117. [Italics mine].

Guillebaud, quoted by Fudge, suggests a similar position, that the damned are reconciled but not saved, but goes on to say that it is only a temporary position, to be followed by subsequent extinction:

Guillebaud raises another interesting question. Philippians 2:9, 10 says that every tongue will confess Jesus' sovereignty, whether in heaven, in earth, or *under the earth*. But, Guillebaud points out, when Paul says God will "sum up all things" in Christ, he includes things in heaven, in earth - but makes no mention of subterranean beings (Eph. 1:9, 10). Does this mean, Guillebaud asks, that "the infernal creatures will *confess* Christ but not be included in His *saving consummation*?"⁵⁸⁸

However, the main development of, and debate about, this position comes in the period 1850-1910 (although I will refer to it as the nineteenth century debate). This debate has been referred to only very occasionally in the twentieth century, and I have recorded references to it in my Appendix. It is not referred to by evangelicals involved in the debate over annihilation.⁵⁸⁹ Indeed even Blocher himself seems ignorant of the precursors of his position. Yet is this third element of reconciliation which was taken in the nineteenth century to be the most distinctive element of the position. Michael Paternoster rightly summarises Birks' position:

his originality showed itself in the speculation that the damned, in spite of their personal loss and shame, would come to accept the justice of their sentence and to worship their judge. He believed that saved and unsaved alike would, each in their way, contribute to the total victory of Christ... Birks, feeling that the total victory of divine goodness is incomplete while an opposition party exists anywhere in the universe, is constrained to say that the damned are not in rebellion, but accept God's sentence and by accepting turn it to his praise.⁵⁹⁰

Again, it is the most distinctive element of the nineteenth century forebears of Blocher's position, and they wrote more extensively on it than on the other elements. There is also a diversity of positions that they adopt. For example, unlike Blocher, a number of the nineteenth century forebears argue that God retains a merciful attitude towards the damned and that the state of the damned was dynamic and could change in hell. For these reasons I will take longer to analyse and assess this element than the others.

For the first part of my analysis I will seek to give an exposition of the position as articulated by Thomas Rawson Birks, who was the leading advocate of Reconciliationism.

⁵⁸⁸ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 355, quoting Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁸⁹ The ACUTE report does refer to the leading protagonist of reconciliation, T.R. Birks, but it doesn't note any relevance for the recent debate. [*Op. cit.*, p. 4, pp. 64-65.]

His prominence is indicated in several ways. Not only was he held to be an able theologian, but he is the writer most often quoted and referred to by theological allies and critics alike. As to Birks' theological ability, I have already noted Rowell's positive appraisal. Dr. Candlish concurs, noting that Birks is from the Evangelical wing of the Church of England, and that "he is one of the ablest and best of that school." As well as expounding Birks' position, I will also expound the positions of other proponents of Reconciliationism, particularly where they differ or serve to clarify an issue. I will present the main arguments used in favour of Reconciliationism, followed by the chief criticisms of it, noting that there are a variety of positions. I will then contrast the position of Blocher, as developed in this thesis, with the predominant position in the nineteenth century debate: I will conclude that, where there are differences, Blocher's position is usually preferable, and that Reconciliationism is a valuable alternative understanding of the fate of the damned which offers distinct advantages over classic Traditionalism and Annihilationism.

3.5.3.1 An Exposition of Reconciliationism

I begin by describing the various forms of Reconciliationism. Birks' "major statement of his position"⁵⁹¹ is *The Victory of Divine Goodness*.⁵⁹² In this book Birks twice offers a numbered summary of his position within a few pages of each other. I will quote the second since it contains an additional sub-division, along with a briefer summary he gives in his response to Dr. Candlish's criticisms.

The main doctrines on the judgement to come asserted or implied in my work are these. Firstly, that the moral contrast between the righteous and the wicked, in this life, leads to an eternal and solemn contrast of doom, of reward or of punishment, in the life to come. Secondly, that everlasting punishment does not mean extinction or cessation of all being, but an abiding for ever under the penal and condemning sentence of the righteous and holy Judge.⁵⁹³ Thirdly, that this punishment will be complete, not incomplete; so as not merely to confine from without, but to subdue and crush the rebellious will under the mighty power of God, revealed in judgement; so that there will be, and can be, no eternal reign of Satan, and no power of active mutual torment on the part of men and angels, under this condemnation. [The earlier list concludes: "This is the contrast to the

⁵⁹⁰ Paternoster, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

⁵⁹¹ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵⁹² Birks, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 211. In the earlier list the implication is spelt out further: "This is the contrast of the doctrine of Annihilation or Absolute Destruction of being itself."

mediaeval superstition, which assigns to Satan a rival empire to God's own dominion for evermore."⁵⁹⁴] Fourthly, that the perfections of God, who is at once just and gracious, lead to the conclusion that since righteousness, as well as grace, is displayed for ever towards the saved, so grace, mercy, and compassion, in some mysterious form, will be displayed, as well as righteous justice, towards even the worst and guiltiest of the creatures of God. Fifthly, that the general nature of such mercy may, and probably will, consist in a contemplation, passively and under Divine compulsion, of the infinite goodness of the Lord, a contemplation rendered possible to lost souls only by the strict execution of the solemn threatenings of God.⁵⁹⁵

Birks also summarises his position in his response to Candlish, as follows.

First, they who die in their sins will be punished, and punished for ever, by the sentence of the Righteous Judge. Neither will they cease to exist, nor have their sentence reversed, so as to mingle with the saved and glorified... Next, this punishment will not be so incomplete, as that Satan will still reign over the lost and torment them, or that they will actively blaspheme and torment each other, but will imply their entire subjection under the mighty hand of God. They will be made the footstool of Christ. Thirdly, because this judgement is so complete, it will involve the capacity for a passive contemplation of God's perfect goodness, so far as He may be pleased to unfold it; such as tends in its own nature to adoration, wonder, and praise... Its extent and degree I leave as a solemn mystery, which eternity alone may reveal.⁵⁹⁶

I now turn to examine Birks' position in more detail, along with the positions of other proponents of what I have termed Reconciliationism, and I begin with the issue of how this doctrine of hell is best categorised. Despite Birks' formal distinction between the blessedness of the damned and the righteous, the most common criticism from traditionalists is that this is a distinction without substance, and that that the doctrine of reconciliation is actually a doctrine of Universalism, or 'Restorationism' or 'Restitutionism' as it is also called in the debate. If this charge could be substantiated it would be a very strong argument against Reconciliationism for evangelicals, because Universalism is usually regarded as an unacceptable doctrine for evangelicals. The ACUTE report states, "we understand universalism to be divergent from authentic evangelical faith..."⁵⁹⁷ A typical charge that Reconciliationism is actually a form of Universalism is made by William Reid, who in the *Appendix* to his book lists Birks under the heading "Writers who

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.

⁵⁹⁶ T.R. Birks, *The Atonement and the Judgment: A Reply to Dr. Candlish's Inaugural Lecture; with a Brief Statement of Facts in Connection with the Evangelical Alliance* (Rivingtons: London, 1870), pp. 23-24.

advocate the doctrine of universal restoration." He then appends a quote by another critic who says: "[Birks] emphatically reiterates his belief in the doctrine of eternal punishment. Yet his qualifications and premises come so near to Universalism as to create a danger, and demand some notice."⁵⁹⁸ Another example is from Dr. Candlish who concludes his discussion of Birks' position that "his doctrine at bottom is really that of universal restoration."⁵⁹⁹ A more recent verdict is from the ACUTE report which describes his position as a 'modified restitutionism'.⁶⁰⁰ An important challenge for reconciliationists is therefore to demonstrate that there is an understanding of reconciliation that is not restoration. I will argue that such an understanding is possible. However, there are a range of positions that were held by reconciliationists, and I will argue that the distinction is clearer and more secure on Blocher's position than Birks', and more secure on Birks' than on that of some other advocates such as Langton Clarke's. Two of the key differences between writers are the possibility for change in the state of the damned, and the attitude of God toward the damned. I will examine Birks' position first, then compare it with Langton Clarke's who comments extensively on this issue and who is the writer who most blurs the distinction. I will draw a comparison between both writers and Blocher at the end.

Birks does make some statements that might suggest Universalism. In speaking of the contemplation of God which the damned are capable of, he carefully notes the difference to that of the saints, but also goes some way towards Universalism:

... its attainment may be possible only in part to souls under sentence of judgement; its effect, though its own tendency is to unutterable blessedness, may account only to some merciful relief of what would else be unmingled, as well as hopeless, misery; and their adoration, being the result of compulsion, not of free choice, would never deserve to be called holy adoration.⁶⁰¹

In an earlier work, *Letter V, On Future Punishment* he describes the state of the damned as "in its own nature, unutterably blessed."⁶⁰² In his later *Reply to Recent Strictures* he points out, in response to criticism on this point, that he was careful to say that they were not

⁵⁹⁷ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 32. Also, in their 'Conclusions and Recommendations': "We also reject the teaching of Universalism, which holds that all will be saved regardless of their commitment to Christ (Rom. 2:12-16; Luke 1:15; 18:15-17; Rom. 10:9-13; Matt. 7:13)." [*Ibid.*, p. 131].

⁵⁹⁸ Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 314, quoting Randle's *Essay*, p. 269.

⁵⁹⁹ Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁶⁰⁰ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁶⁰¹ Birks, *Victory*, p. 244.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

necessarily as blessed as the righteous, but that it was as blessed as they could be "in their own nature."⁶⁰³ However, Birks uses the language of salvation with respect to the damned.

They will be saved from bodily corruption,... They will be saved from the curse of hopeless vanity, from the first death, in which the creature is self-ruined, and God himself is not glorified, but for ever blasphemed. They will be saved from the abyss,... Will they not also be saved from that utter, hopeless misery, where no ray of light or comfort breaks in on the solitude of everlasting despair? Will they not be saved, in a strange, mysterious sense, when the depth of their unchangeable shame and sorrow finds beneath it a still lower depth of Divine compassion, and the creature, in its most forlorn state, is shut in by the vision of surpassing and infinite love?⁶⁰⁴

However, Birks explicitly denies that his position is universalist, understood as the salvation of all people, as the first points in both of his numbered summaries show.

Further, in a lengthy quote, he outlines the various routes to such Universalism which he rejects, and the distinct position he advocates. In his *Seventh Letter*, his questioner expresses the hope "that ultimately all created beings will be pardoned..." Birks responds:

Now, if you mean by pardon, what I fear some persons mean by it, the cessation of vindictive malice on the part of God towards particular sinners, then such pardon is never given to any, because such malice has no existence, save in the chimeras of a conscience defiled and perverted by sin. Or, if it means an act of grace, which shall admit the unholy, in their unholiness, to the vision of God, such pardon is an essential and inherent impossibility. Again, if we mean by it a miraculous act, after this life, whereby an exercise of Divine sovereignty effects the change in a moment in lost souls, which the Gospel and the Spirit have failed to effect here, without any further "sacrifice for sins" (Heb. X), it is doubtful whether such a work is possible in its own nature, and the statements of Scripture give us the strongest reasons to disbelieve its future occurrence... On the other hand, if it be meant that the infliction of just punishment is not the whole of God's purpose towards the unsaved; but that, while His holiness is for ever manifested in the fulfilment of His warnings, and in their own irreparable loss and shame, there will, even in the depth of that ruin, be such a display of the unchangeable love of the Holy Creator to all the creatures of his hand, such depths of compassion to the self-ruined, as, without reversing their doom, may send a thrill of wondrous consolation through the abyss of what would else be unmingled woe and despair, - I do believe, for many reasons, that such a display of God's all-perfect love is truly kept in store for the ages to come. While clear, its truth may be deduced by humble and reverent hearts from patient study of the

⁶⁰³ T.R. Birks, *Reply to Recent Strictures*, [Added to the 5th ed. of *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, op. cit.], p. 244.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

Scripture, and from calm meditation on the sure victory of good over evil, and the mingling of mercy with judgement in the perfection of the Most High.⁶⁰⁵ Compared to a classic traditionalist position, this is certainly a step or two towards Universalism: Birks allows for the love of God towards the damned and in response they will experience "a thrill of wondrous consolation." Further, as I will argue below, this is also closer to Universalism than the position of Blocher in which there is neither divine love for the damned, nor any necessary mitigation of the awfulness of the state of the damned because of that love. However Birks is also explicit that this is still mingled with God's "judgement" and their sense of "woe and despair," and this clearly distinguishes his position from Universalism.

Candlish, in his criticism above, also recognises this formal distinction between the two positions. However Candlish's primary reason for rejecting Birks' distinction between reconciliation and restoration is that such a passive contemplation by the damned requires the regeneration of the damned. This is similar to the issue of lucidity. Candlish writes,

But, as I cannot help thinking, they all imply this serious consequence, at least, that the finally lost may, nay, must have an apprehension and appreciation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, such as he [Birks], as well as I, would strenuously maintain cannot be got now, except through the regenerating and enlightening operations of the Holy Ghost... Surely there is in all this a sad and serious under-estimate of man's inability to "see God," in our Lord's sense of that phrase,...⁶⁰⁶

Birks' answer would be, I think, that this partial vision of God by the damned does not require regeneration but is the result of punishment forcing them to contemplate God. I will examine this at greater length below, after examining a related distinction.

Related to this issue of the difference between reconciliation and restoration is the issue of the experience of the damned. Birks argues from two distinctions: that "every created being may be viewed in two different aspects, internal and external;"⁶⁰⁷ and an understanding "that all happiness is of two kinds, personal and federal, one resulting directly from blessings strictly our own, and the other from sympathy with the joys of others, or from the contemplation of external and objective truth."⁶⁰⁸ These distinctions are

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

⁶⁰⁶ Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁶⁰⁷ Birks, *Victory*, p. 42.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

then combined to argue that while the damned suffer subjectively and personally, there is also an objective and federal element in which they can share in the blessing of heaven by its passive contemplation. However Birks admits that this "further objective or federal element... is nowhere in the Bible, in set terms, explicitly revealed."⁶⁰⁹ Candlish isolates this understanding of the psychology of the damned as Birks' starting point. Candlish claims that Birks has combined the former, personal, aspect, which underlies Traditionalism, with the latter, federal, aspect which underlies the 'new' view, by which he means Universalism.⁶¹⁰ Therefore, as Candlish summarises Birks' argument,

Along with "the utmost personal humiliation, shame and anguish," there may be "the passive contemplation of a ransomed universe, and all the innumerable varieties of blessedness enjoyed by unfallen spirits and the ransomed people of God; such a contemplation as would be fitted, in its own nature, to raise the soul into a trance of holy adoration in the presence of infinite and unsearchable goodness."⁶¹¹

Birks illustrates the psychology of the damned with an analogy drawn from the life of General Wolfe. Candlish examines this example at length, first summarising it.

Wolfe, expiring in the arms of victory, may lose his sense of his own dying pain in his patriotic joy of sympathy with his king and country, and this may be said to show a double character: the one personal and individual, the other relative or federal. In the one, he feels his wounds as touching himself. In the other, he loses and merges himself personally - his personal self - in his covenant relation to a higher circle, or in his rapt admiration of some absorbing object or event. But is it conceivable that a man could live long in this nicely-poised balance, in his double character, between anguish or delight? Or that he could live in it to all eternity? And, especially as regards the analogical use made of this instance, is it conceivable that the condemned sinner, personally kept in penal shame and torment through everlasting ages by the righteous Judge, should yet be able, in his federal character, apart from his own personal interest in it, or its bearing on himself personally, to behold with complacency, as a sort of abstract object of admiration, the glorious love of Him under whose inexorable penal sentence he is all the while lying? - or to behold with sympathy the members of the family to which he federally belongs, who actually enjoy it, as he never can hope to do? I much doubt if that is true to human nature in any state. It seems to be to demand superhuman virtue, a sort of supernatural disinterestedness.⁶¹²

Candlish thus responds that this presents a picture of the state of the damned which is at least psychologically unrealistic, and probably psychologically impossible. In response to this charge that his view of the damned is untrue to human nature because "It seems to

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶¹⁰ Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.3, quoting Birks, *Victory*, p. 45.

⁶¹² Candlish, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

demand superhuman virtue, and supernatural disinterestedness,”⁶¹³ Birks argues that Candlish has failed to take into account the impact of God’s judgement. Birks writes:

But the most essential feature in the statements I have made is that such contemplation has become possible to the unsaved by punishment, and Divine compulsion alone. The soul has forfeited for ever the highest dignity of willing and free co-operation with the will of God; but this is no reason why the natural capacity for admiring what is unspeakably glorious should also have passed away for ever.⁶¹⁴

Birks is even clearer about the element of compulsion in his earlier *Reply*.

They will be compelled, under the mighty hand of God, to see and own the justice of their sentence; while their own folly and guilt in despising the warnings of a God of love will fill them with a sense of everlasting shame. But this utter extinction, by judgement, and by judgement alone, of their pride and blasphemy, and this compulsory submission under the mighty hand of the Holy Judge, will open the way for such a contemplation of Creative Power, All-seeing Wisdom, and Redeeming Goodness - all surpassingly glorious - as shall constitute, not bliss, indeed, or joy, but an awful and stupendous consolation...⁶¹⁵

He also writes of “Their adoration, being the result of compulsion, not of free choice,...”⁶¹⁶ However, again it is important to note that Birks is careful to argue that the response of the damned is not merely maintained by external force, since that would mean that their response was hypocritical, but is also a result of a consequent transformed perspective, that is lucidity. Further, I don’t think that Birks’ position does suffer from being psychologically unrealistic, as Candlish charges. I think that the analogy of a prisoner who, having come to realise the enormity of his crime, accepts the justice of his punishment, and is praiseworthy of the judge, is quite realistic. Candlish I think fails to take adequate account of the effect of the lucidity given at the Last Judgement.

Some writers in the nineteenth century debate do however have a much less secure distinction between reconciliation and restoration. I will examine the position of Langton Clarke because he writes at some length on the question; his position is different to Birks at a number of points; and he goes furthest in seeing mitigations in the state of the damned. Clarke distinguishes between two main types, or levels, of the reconciliation doctrine. Level one is the acquiescence to punishment by the damned;

⁶¹³ Quoted in Birks, *Atonement*, p. 28.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶¹⁵ Birks, *Victory*, p. 270.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

level two is the restoration to sonship, but still a lesser state than that of the righteous. I will quote Clarke's discussion at length.

[I]f the saving element really does continue, then we may venture to add to the conception of reconciliation as distinguished from full restoration to all that might have been, another feature, namely, that the reconciled are not only in a state in which acquiescence in their punishment results in peace and content, but are also restored to a condition of sonship which is not only a joy to the reconciled, but also to the angels of God in heaven, and to the Heavenly Father Himself... Yet even this state is not full restoration to all that might have been.⁶¹⁷

Clarke then uses the Prodigal Son to illustrate this higher level of restoration which falls short of all that could have been.

The parable of the prodigal son enables us to see clearly that while reconciliation is something higher than a peaceful acquiescence in punishment, it is yet lower than restoration to all that might have been. [The father could have said to the returning son] "..., I will make such arrangements as will ensure your comfort and peace away from home." The Prodigal, if he were really penitent and meant what he said, could not but feel the wisdom and justice of this decision; and though debarred from the delight of restoration to his home, he would still "accept his condition as just, and be at peace." But the father in the parable does much more than this. In the overflowing of his joy he not only receives the prodigal home again, but receives him not as a hired servant, but as a son, and shows more special marks of rejoicing over him than he had ever shown in the case of the elder son who went astray. By so much, as it seems to me, is the reconciliation of the truly penitent in the world to come a more blessed state than that of a peaceful and contented acquiescence in punishment.⁶¹⁸

However, this raises the question of what the difference is between the highest rung of hell and the lowest rung of heaven. Clarke concludes by emphasising the difference between these two levels:

But the rest of the parable makes it equally clear that the resultant state of reconciliation and acceptance, joyful and blessed beyond all hope of the prodigal though it was, was yet something decidedly lower than full restoration to his former condition... [it] does not for one moment mean that any part of what belongs to the elder (and *all* belongs to him) is to be taken from him and given to the younger,... By so much does the reconciliation and acceptance, however blessed it may be, which awaits those who only in the future life are brought by God's judgements to true repentance, fall short of full restoration to all that might have been, had they lived here the life of faith and love, and departed hence in the Lord.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ Clarke, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-6.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 346-7.

However, this use of the parable raises difficulties, and opens Clarke to the charge of not having adequately distinguished reconciliation from restoration, since the prodigal son is usually taken to refer to those who respond positively to God in this life.

Clarke uses few non-Scriptural analogies, but does offer the following to show that permanent loss can be combined with blessing: "...by idleness in school days succeeded by hard work, which, though it meets with its reward, can never altogether make up for the idleness at school."⁶²⁰ Although Clarke doesn't develop this type of analogy,

Illingworth does, and seems to hold a very similar position. Therefore, I quote

Illingworth's discussion of a spendthrift to illuminate Clarke's position.

[W]e can conceive of a punishment that shall be everlasting, without doing violence to our sense of Divine justice. For we have an analogy for it within the limits of this life. Take the case of a man who was a culpable spendthrift, in his youth, and so reduced himself to penury for the remainder of his life. His poverty is his punishment, and as long as he resents it he is in misery; but no sooner does he recognise its justice, than he can bear it with cheerful acquiescence, as God's will. Yet the punishment remains; he has all the incapacities of poverty, and can never now do the good that he might have done with his wealth... Men are being perpetually punished by the life-long consequences of their sins; but if they accept the punishment, it ceases to be pain; for they become in Dante's language 'content within the fire.' Now one can conceive a similar process in the future life; that men may there wake to recognise that, by their earthly conduct, they have brought themselves for ever to a lower state than might have been, and are to that extent everlastingly punished, while yet they accept their condition as divinely just, and are at peace.⁶²¹

However Clarke makes the penal element of reconciliation clearer than Illingworth when he writes:

Eternal Judgement is the process by which that vast portion of mankind which has not in this life, owing to ignorance or wilful sin, accepted the reconciliation worked for mankind, while yet sinners, by the *death* of Christ, is reconciled to God... Reconciliation which has not been achieved in this life, though it is salvation, is salvation of a lower kind, salvation with loss, as by fire - the fire kindled by the punitive element in the Eternal Judgeship, the fire of punishments corrective in their tendency, and (as we may be permitted to hope, though we may not dare to go the length of positively asserting this) eventually corrective in their result.⁶²²

Clarke's final sentence shows that he holds a dynamic conception of hell in which further change is possible, and that the type of reconciliation exemplified by the

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶²¹ J.R. Illingworth, *Reason and Revelation: An Essay in Christian Apology* (2nd ed. Macmillan and Co.: London, 1906), p. 231.

⁶²² Clarke, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-5. [Italics original].

Prodigal Son is a hope but not a certainty. Clarke then clarifies his position when he asks, expecting a negative answer: "Does Scripture teach that there is such a thing as *final* impenitence, i.e., an impenitence which can *never* change through endless ages notwithstanding all the resources and influences of Divine Wisdom and Love?"⁶²³

Further, Clarke writes,

The doctrine of endless sin and misery seems really to destroy and annihilate the freedom of the human will in the future life at the same time that it seems strongly to assert it;... It seems a strange kind of freedom of will which has boundless powers of resistance, but is impotent to turn back to God.⁶²⁴

Clarke also holds that God does not cease to desire the rescue of the wicked from hell.

"We cannot conceive of a God of Unchangeable Love *ever* ceasing to *desire* the rescue of the wicked from their unspeakably awful misery."⁶²⁵ The combination of divine love for the damned, the free-will of the damned, and the beneficial effects of punishment, all enable him to hope for the reconciliation of all people. Thus he speaks of "a continuous stream of reconciled and purified sinners pouring night and day through the ever open gates into the Holy City,..."⁶²⁶ where this refers to 'salvation with loss' in the period after the Last Judgement.

Most other writers in the debate seem to follow Clarke at this point, in their willingness to countenance some kind of continued free-will in hell. Thus, Garratt also has a dynamic understanding of hell, although he too excludes full restoration. "On this lower level we may imagine all degrees of punishment and all kinds of change without in any degree interfering with the permanent loss."⁶²⁷ Again, "Punishment so long as resisted (for God will force no one's hand) inevitably galls. But punishment submitted to may without being removed bring its own relative blessing."⁶²⁸ One difficulty with this free-will approach is that the universal suppression of sin is no longer a necessary consequence of the universal rule of Christ. If the damned could remain in their rebellion, then it can't be necessary that they don't! On the other hand, if it were argued that all will in fact submit, but after a period of time, then not only is it hard to see why they should all do so if they retain free-will, but it removes the complete victory over sin

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, p. 95. [Italics original]

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁶²⁵ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶²⁷ Samuel Garratt, *Veins of Silver or, Truths Hidden Beneath the Surface* (2nd ed. London: Charles J. Thynne, 1904), p. 158.

from the Last Judgement to some later undetermined period. This then reintroduces what I earlier called the New Intermediate State, after the Last Judgement, while the righteous await the final victory of Christ. Here then is an important distinction between Blocher and the nineteenth century proponents: whereas Clarke, for example, holds a free-will or dynamic understanding of hell, Blocher holds to a fixed hell in which the state of the damned does not change after the Last Judgment.

Clarke does refer to the possible implications of his position as a form of Universalism. "The theory does not itself prove it [Universalism], but I fully admit that, if true, it justifies a great increase of hope that Universalism (modified by the view of possible reconciliation for all rather than full restoration) may be a true doctrine."⁶²⁹ However, Clarke also sets out the difference between his view and Universalism very clearly, describing his position as reconciliation, rather than restoration:

The difference then between Restoration and Reconciliation is plain. *Restoration* means, given two men, both of whom have had full knowledge of Christ in this life, and one of whom has lived the life of faith working by love, the other has drawn back unto perdition, that the latter shall eventually in some future age be restored to all that he might have been had he lived like the former.

Reconciliation means that the latter may indeed inherit a blessing, but not *the* blessing which he forfeited by his backsliding, or by neglecting so great salvation.... Reconciliation means that he may indeed be saved, but not restored; saved but *with loss*, not with the exceeding weight of glory which is the reward of the true believer; redeemed, but *with judgement*, subjected to the punitive element in the Eternal Judgeship which the other altogether escapes.⁶³⁰

Finally, Clarke can also write as if his position lies somewhere between Traditionalism and Universalism:

The antithesis to salvation is, according to the view taken in this book, *not the elimination of the saving element from the Eternal Judgeship of Christ, but the abiding of the punitive*. This appears to be the middle truth between two extremes of error, which teach, the one, the abolition of the saving element, the other, the abolition of the punitive.⁶³¹

Again, he speaks of "the main contention of this treatise - namely, that the saving element continues throughout the eternal Judgeship of Christ..."⁶³²

⁶²⁸ Samuel Garratt, *World Without End* (William Hunt and Co.: London, 1886), p. 262.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87. [Italics original]

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86. [Italics original]

⁶³² *Ibid.*, p. 345.

In conclusion, Clarke does hold that his view is a distinct fourth view, differing from both Traditionalism and Universalism, and therefore it might be as accurate to call him a modified universalist as a modified traditionalist. However all the authors surveyed reject the claim that their doctrine is fully universalist. There are also several important differences between the positions of Clarke and the Nineteenth Century writers and the position of Blocher. First, the older position has a higher level of reconciliation: the vision of the state of the damned is closer to that of the righteous than Blocher's. Second, the older position has what I will call a weak doctrine of reconciliation, since it is not a necessary final state, but hoped for, unlike Blocher for whom reconciliation is certain.

One final, surprising, element in Clarke's position I will note is that he also holds that extinction would follow if the damned remained impenitent. Most reconciliationist writers are firm in their rejection of Annihilationism, and Clarke is unique in leaving open the possibility of extinction: "And I fully admit that IF there is such a state possible for any human being as a state of endless and hopeless impenitence, then such a state would involve Annihilation... for preservation is with a view to restoration or Reconciliation..."⁶³³ However, it is hard to see how Clarke can justify this, both given his critical comments about Annihilationism, and also given the continuing possibility for change with the continuing free-will of the damned, love of God and the potentially reformatory effects of punishment.

Before continuing with my examination of Birks' position, I will more briefly note some features of Garratt, another proponent of Reconciliationism in the nineteenth century. In particular he gives a more extensive variety of analogies for the state of the damned than any other writer, some of which I will note before proceeding. Garratt says that hell "is a destiny of everlasting shame, but not everlasting sin."⁶³⁴ Shame is a key term to describe the state of the damned for Garratt.

Shame is not always an unmitigated evil, nor is humiliation. At all events, shame is better than shamelessness, and humiliation than pride. When there is shame on account of sin and humiliation is accepted, who shall dare to say that it is not a moral progress? And who shall say what may not be the resulting blessing?⁶³⁵

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶³⁴ Garratt, *World*, p. 227.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

Garratt characterises the damned as in “humble, willing submission.”⁶³⁶ This submission to punishment doesn’t remove or reduce it, but does transform the damned’s experience of it. He gives an extensive illustration of his position, based on the narrative in Dr. Browning’s *Convict Ship and England’s Exiles*.⁶³⁷ Browning, who was a physician on a convict ship, notes that due to conversion,

the change [amongst the convicts] was such in their moral character that they submitted without repining to the penal discipline of the ship, and gave every promise of being diligent servants and obedient subjects in that penal colony, in which many of them were condemned to spend the remainder of their lives. When they landed, though few of them could ever cease to be exiles, such was the influence on their minds, so much happier did they feel for the restraints of the convict ship, that the bitter hatred of the law and justice and of its ministers had passed away; and to apply in a lower sense the words of the Psalm [145:9], they owned mercy in that rigid execution of human law which had rendered to each of them according to his work.

We might carry the illustration further. The sentence of transportation for life was in one respect an image of everlasting punishment, that so long as the man lived it lasted. Rebellion against it, the attempt to escape, continued misconduct, any resistance to the sentence led to still worse banishment; but submission to it and good conduct brought with it first relaxation, then elevation. The sentence could not be reversed. But many a convict would have owned that in his case, beneath inexorable judgement, mercy lay concealed.⁶³⁸

In the narrative transformation of the attitude of the convicts occurred through a special work of grace through the preaching of the gospel by Dr. Browning. Garratt does not address the question of whether he believes that there are special works of grace in hell to bring about the transformation of the damned. However, even if the notion is rejected, as Blocher would, it seems to me though that this is still a useful analogy for understanding the fate of the damned.

Garratt uses another analogy for the way that the attitude to punishment can change its quality. “And when God inflicts punishment, though, like the sentence of labour on man and subjection on women, it may change its colour and become a source of joy or a present hell, according as it is submitted to or rebelled against;...”⁶³⁹

Again, Garratt writes,

In fact, the very punishment which God has inflicted, and does continue to inflict on man, of being the bread-winner for his wife and children, is, under the present

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶³⁷ Garratt, *Veins*, p. 166.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-8.

⁶³⁹ Garratt, *World*, pp. 196-7. Garratt then gives a series of biblical examples.

circumstances of life, felt and owned by all right-thinking men to be no calamity; but, though a punishment in form, mercy in reality... It is only felt as punishment when he resists it or leaves it undone.⁶⁴⁰

This seems to suggest a very high degree of blessing and pleasure, for the damned if they fully accept their punishment, and Garratt goes on to speak of, "the result of that first punishment remains, and will remain, the everlasting token of God's anger against sin; yet through His love and wisdom changed, when submitted to, into a source of unnumbered blessings."⁶⁴¹

Again, Garratt's statements raise the obvious question of what prevents this position collapsing into Universalism. Put another way, how does Garratt believe the experience of the damned is different from that of the righteous? It might seem that the highest state of the damned is little different from the lowest state of the blessed. Garratt addresses this issue. He begins by arguing that "there are degrees or orders of infinity."⁶⁴² He then gives an analogy:

An infinite surface is infinitely greater than an infinite line, and an infinite solid than an infinite surface. A line produced into infinity does not become or tend to become a surface; nor a surface, infinitely extended, a solid. There is an infinite difference between an infinite line and an infinite surface, between an infinite surface and an infinite solid. And in an infinitely higher sense, there is an infinite difference between the creature and the Creator; and an everlasting increase in holiness, knowledge, grace of any kind, would have no more tendency to diminish the gulf between the Creator and the creation, between God and man, than a line infinitely produced would have to become a solid.⁶⁴³

Garratt then draws the conclusion to respond to the question above:

And for a similar reason, if the state of everlasting punishment is one which admits of no comparison with that of everlasting blessedness, if they are not separated by gradation but by nature, it is quite possible that in everlasting punishment itself there may be not only difference, as between many stripes and few, but an unlimited improvement and infinite alleviation, without the slightest approach, or tendency to approach, to a reversal of the sentence, or to admission into heaven of the blest.⁶⁴⁴

A difficulty with this argument is that there is no ontological difference between the damned and righteous in the way that there is between the Creator and creatures.

However, later, Garratt re-emphasises his belief about the state of the damned: "It seems to be the permanent sinking to a lower level in the scale of creation, which carries with

⁶⁴⁰ Garratt, *Veins*, p. 160.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

it as its inevitable result, because of the greatness of the forfeited glory, shame and everlasting contempt."⁶⁴⁵

Before turning to examine criticisms of this position, I will note the issue of the destiny of Satan. As I have noted above, there is often a reluctance for annihilationists to address the question of the extinction of Satan, although it is probably required by their arguments. Similarly Reconciliationism probably requires that Satan should also cease to sin, "bow the knee," and reach his "telos." One writer who notes this conclusion is Garratt:

Even Satan, instead of being conqueror and ruling over a kingdom of darkness in which God's creatures are his captives, as some imagine, or, as others think, compelling God to undo His work and put His own creatures out of existence, may, himself conquered, become a footstool for Christ's feet.⁶⁴⁶

This doesn't seem to raise any theological problems beyond those raised below.

In the light of those writers I have expounded in this section, one could divide the positions into strong and weak reconciliation: in the strong version all the damned are of necessity reconciled; in the weak version all the damned may be reconciled but there is no certainty because of continuing free-will. The weak view means that there could be a temporary classic traditional hell for some, which could be permanent if the punishment never achieves its corrective purpose. Clarke offers these two alternatives, although it remains unclear if he thinks anyone will remain permanently unreconciled.

It should be thoroughly understood that I do not go the length of asserting that the continuance of the saving element in the Judgement of Christ must of necessity produce reconciliation... The "lost" may accept their punishment in the spirit of Esau's later life, or in the spirit of Saul's: if in the former spirit, they will find reconciliation though not restoration; if in the latter spirit, they will remain unreconciled; the wrath of God abiding on them till their sin-caused misery makes them, as it made the perishing prodigal, come to themselves.⁶⁴⁷

In conclusion, Reconciliationism is best understood as a modification of Traditionalism. However this classification is clearest for Blocher, followed by Birks, but rather less so for Garratt, while it is debatable that Clarke is better thought of as a modified universalist. Against some commentators, like Reid above, Salmond rightly gives Birks' *The Victory of Divine Goodness* as a reference for a position that is *not* a form of Universalism: "Some,

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁶⁴⁶ Garratt, *World*, p. 227.

who regard the triumph of the Divine love as necessary, but to whom the ingathering of all erring souls seems too great a hope, take refuge in the idea that the final position of the condemned will be one of acquiescence in their condition."⁶⁴⁸ Further, the move to have Birks excluded from the Evangelical Alliance was led by a solicitor, R. Baxter, who admitted Birks' claim to teach a form of Traditionalism, only questioning his interpretation of Scripture.⁶⁴⁹

From the discussion so far, it might be expected that Reconciliationism is also a mitigation of the severity of the hell of classic Traditionalism. This is certainly the understanding of the position in the nineteenth century. So, for example, it can be established as Birks' position in at least three ways: by direct statement; by his doctrine of reserve; and by his distinction of the two deaths. I will examine each in turn, before concluding that this is not the only possibility, and Blocher would seem to take an alternative view. So, I turn to the evidence from Birks and others that reconciliation is a mitigation of classic Traditionalism. First, Birks states clearly that he believes Reconciliationism is a mitigation. Writing of the contemplation of God by the damned, he notes, "its effect, though its own tendency is to unutterable blessedness, may amount only to some merciful relief of what would else be unmingled, as well as hopeless, misery..."⁶⁵⁰ Birks also argues that many people disbelieve in the hell of classic Traditionalism because of its harshness.⁶⁵¹

Second, there is the evidence from Birks' doctrine of reserve. The doctrine of reserve, with respect to the doctrine of hell, argues that any mitigation of hell should be communicated cautiously because it lessens the deterrent effect against sin in this life. This has been a widely advocated reason for the suppression of discussion of the doctrine of hell.⁶⁵² Birks holds to a form of the doctrine of reserve and argues that this new doctrine should only be made known gradually, as people's consciences become

⁶⁴⁷ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁶⁴⁸ S.D.F. Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality* (4th ed. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), p. 665.

⁶⁴⁹ For a brief historical account, see J.B.A. Kessler Jnr., *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1968), pp. 67-69.

⁶⁵⁰ Birks, *Victory*, p. 244.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁵² See Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-8.

troubled by classic Traditionalism.⁶⁵³ Garratt also speaks of the need for reserve. Using the analogy of transportation for life, and the fact that this could result in a prosperous career for the convict, he notes,

But judges did not disclose the fact to convicts... The blessed truth as to the loving and holy purpose of everlasting punishment is a pearl to be carefully handled, a secret not to be too rashly divulged, but told to God's children, or to those who are thinking of God wrongly and need to be taught that He is indeed love. It may sometimes, when God's character is called in question on account of false impressions widely spread on this subject, as is the case now, be necessary to speak more openly and plainly. But it is easy to see why in Scripture the purpose of everlasting punishment is revealed more dimly than the fact itself. Yet it is revealed.⁶⁵⁴

A third piece of evidence for the contention that Birks holds that Reconciliationism is a mitigation of the traditionalist hell is found in his discussion of the two deaths. Birks' argument is based on what Candlish calls: "The very key-stone of his whole edifice - his doctrine about the nature of the second death."⁶⁵⁵ Birks compares the two deaths:

The one, the second death, is the 'lake of fire', solemn indeed and most awful, yet bounded in its range, shut in by firm land on every side. The other, the first death, is 'the deep', the abyss, 'the bottomless pit', evil reigning, rioting, growing, deepening without limit and without end, in its final descent, farther and farther from light and happiness and heaven. By the sentence of the law, fulfilled without atonement or redemption, mankind, thus fallen, would be shut out from God's presence, and sink, and sink, and sink for ever, in this abyss of hopeless and endless ruin.⁶⁵⁶

In other words, Birks argues, uniquely so far as I know, that there is a group of texts which suggest a classic traditionalist hell, but they all apply to the first death. Thus, Birks only holds a distinctive view about hell when the term is applied to the state of the damned in the second death, after the benefits of Christ's passion have been applied to the damned. Therefore, as is so often the case in this debate, the situation is more complex than at first appears: Birks in fact holds that there is a classic traditionalist hell, but that it then changes into a modified traditionalist hell as a result of the atonement. It could therefore be said that Birks is a partial classic traditionalist! He holds that the traditionalist hell *is* the punishment for sin, including the features of infinite decline into sinfulness, and perhaps madness. And this hell is the punishment of the first death. If this position is held, however, then it would have to deal with my arguments against the

⁶⁵³ Birks, *Victory*, p.63, and Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁶⁵⁴ Garratt, *World*, pp. 228-229.

⁶⁵⁵ Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

traditionalist hell that claim that it fails to be properly penal! I will discuss the relevance of the atonement in Birks' writing further in chapter four.

That Reconciliationism is a mitigation of the severity of Traditionalism is also the conclusion of a number of traditionalist commentators. Reid concludes his discussion of Birks:

To those who are always ready to welcome any relaxation of Divine threatening, this novel doctrine, however devoid of Scriptural support, will offer a subterfuge. All its author's protests against any repeal or termination of the final sentence will probably not suffice to prevent their finding encouragement to sin in the prospect of a much lighter penalty than is held out by the plainest terms of Holy Writ: especially as the new doctrine comes from a clergyman of high intellectual repute, and one of the most earnest vindicators of evangelical Christianity.⁶⁵⁷

However, this is not the uniform position. Garratt can argue that divine mercy shown to the damned in reconciliation does not diminish the sense of dread of punishment, but actually increases it.

And as it is well known that mercy so shown does not in the least diminish, but rather increases the dread with which earthly punishment is regarded, so I believe that if it was understood that in eternal punishment God will not leave men alone, or allow them to corrupt one another, but by His stern yet loving discipline restrain sin and lead to submission, wicked men would fear it more,
⁶⁵⁸
 ...

A consequence of Garratt's position is that he argues that the hell of Traditionalism is not adequately penal, which is similar to my conclusion concerning the lack of lucidity in classic Traditionalism, even if the justification differs.

"[F]or the sinner to be left to his own ways without judgement and without punishment, that would have been irremediable ruin, involving a continual descent in the scale of moral character; whereas when God condemns and punishes, and then Christ Himself is Judge, His holy punishment is calculated to benefit and not to injure, to elevate morally and not to degrade him who suffers it."⁶⁵⁹

Garratt can also write that his view is a mitigation, even "an unlimited improvement and infinite alleviation."⁶⁶⁰ His argument here is, I think, similar to Blocher's for whom the punishment is both more severe, and yet there is also a mitigation, since both are the product of lucidity. The damned are unable to evade the seriousness of their sin, and this is to increase the severity of their punishment compared to the classic traditionalist view

⁶⁵⁶ Birks, *Victory*, p. 157; quoted by Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁶⁵⁷ Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

⁶⁵⁸ Garratt, *Veins*, pp. 168-9.

⁶⁵⁹ Garratt, *World*, p. 235.

that has the damned continuing to rebel against God and his judgements, and thus to evade the truth about themselves. However, the same vision of God which highlights their own sin also highlights the justice of the punishment, for which God is praiseworthy, and the contemplation of these perfections is in some sense a mitigation.

Before turning to examine more closely some of the arguments for Reconciliationism, I will briefly summarise the main differences between reconciliationists, which largely reflect the differences between the nineteenth century proponents and Blocher's position which I have sought to develop. There are four major issues. First, there are differences over the necessity of the submission of the damned. For writers like Clarke and Garratt for whom the damned retain free-will, there is no certainty about the submission of the damned. However, for Blocher, and to a lesser degree Birks as well, submission is a necessity from the requirements of justice, which is further demonstrated by the second difference.

Second, there are differences over the timing of, and means to, the submission of the damned. For Birks submission is the result of punishment:

... the punishment will not be so incomplete as to leave the wicked in the active commission of eternal blasphemy, defiant rebellion, and mutual torment, but will bring them, as the footstool of Christ, into a state of passive subjection and utter and complete humiliation under the mighty hand of God.⁶⁶¹

This implies that there is a temporal process at work at which the damned begin in rebellion, but are gradually subdued. However, on Blocher's position, this subjection takes place completely at the Last Judgement, and is necessary for the punishment to be just. Therefore there is no process or progress in hell, emphasised by Blocher's notion of the fixity of the damned.

Third, there are differences over the presence of mercy in hell. For the nineteenth century writers God continues to love and be merciful towards the damned. However, it can also be argued that hell does not exhibit the love and mercy of God, but only his wrath. This latter position is, I think, closer to Blocher's view, for whom the modification of hell from Traditionalism is due to the requirements of justice and the

⁶⁶⁰ Garratt, *Veins*, p. 126, quoted at length above.

⁶⁶¹ Birks, *Victory*, p. 211.

cessation of sin with its excessive dualism, rather than the love and mercy of God. Put another way, when Birks summarises the two main reasons why he holds his view, he gives them as the victory of God and the character of God.⁶⁶² In this thesis I have argued that the victory of God does indeed demand a modification of Traditionalism, such that the damned submit to their punishment. However, one can still hold to Reconciliationism while rejecting Birks arguments from the character of God, and in particular that the love and mercy of God extend to the damned in hell. This difference also relates to that of the scope of the atonement. Birks argues from a universal scope of the atonement to justify his position of mercy in hell. However, it is also possible to reject such a position and hold that no blessings gained on the cross are extended to the damned in hell while remaining a reconciliationist.

Fourth, there are differences over the mitigation of the severity of hell. For most of the nineteenth century writers reconciliation is a definite mitigation, to the extent that at points it is hard to determine what distinguishes the experience of the damned from the righteous. Alternatively, these modifications to Traditionalism can be understood to lead not to a lessening of torment, but, if anything, to its increase. Thus for Blocher there is no room for Lewis' 'black pleasure'⁶⁶³ in hell, since the damned are not able to 'enjoy' their freedom, but are faced with the full consequences and awfulness of their sin and its penal consequences. However, I would accept that there are additional blessings that are experienced by the damned at the same time, and that these could also be understood as some sort of mitigation. Blocher certainly speculates that this may be a better fate for the damned than extinction when he asks, suggesting a negative reply, "Would *annihilation* be a better fate, objectively, and even subjectively, for the lost themselves?"⁶⁶⁴ He concludes, "If we may cautiously trust the larger hope that the existence of the lost shall not amount to a total waste, neither for the universe, nor for God, nor for themselves, it may shed some encouraging light on the problem of evil."⁶⁶⁵

However, the fundamental agreement between all the proponents of Reconciliationism is that the damned either do, or may, cease to sin, and are lucid, and are in some sense

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁶³ Lewis, *Problem*, p. 114.

⁶⁶⁴ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 311. [Italics original]

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

reconciled to God. Before moving on, I will add one more analogy and mention two more writers who are suggestive of Reconciliationism and also add a significant point of development. The analogy, similar to that of the exiled prisoners above, is of a prisoner who accepts the justice of his punishment and who is not therefore released, and may even insist that he 'serves his time'. An example of this is given by O'Donovan in his booklet on capital punishment. He writes about the case of Gary Gilmore who preferred to be executed than use the appeal procedures. "He found the idea of execution dignifying. He was fighting to be allowed to 'die like a man'. He wished his death to be, as many have wished it, an act of purpose, a joy and a triumph. It was, in its way, a religious attitude."⁶⁶⁶ I think that this is both a more complete punishment, and less 'dualistic' than an analogy where the prisoner refuses to accept his sentence, as classic Traditionalism holds.

The first additional writer who is suggestive of Reconciliationism who I want to mention is Robert Anderson, one time Inspector of Scotland Yard in the Victorian era. Anderson is of interest because he is usually acknowledged as a traditionalist; and yet he actually develops the notion of reconciliation to suggest the damned will serve God. The references to Anderson in the current debate are rare, yet Vernon Grounds notes that

His discussion of eschatology, *Human Destiny: After Death - What?*, Spurgeon praised as the most satisfactory treatment of that problem he had ever read. After examining the theories of universalism, conditionalism, and annihilationism and showing their untenability from a scriptural perspective, Anderson states some of the prevalent misconceptions about hell. He then proceeds to undercut the case against eternal punishment...⁶⁶⁷

He is therefore usually categorised as a mainstream traditionalist. However, Anderson lists a number of difficulties with what he believes is the traditional understanding of hell. I will quote those relevant to this discussion:

What are those difficulties? That God should tolerate the existence of evil for eternity... That banished from love and light and peace to their awful prison home, Satan shall reign over [the damned] for evermore, and his foul demons shall revel in their anguish... [the best in hell] shall be herded with the vilest and the worst of men, and trampled on by devils; in time to grow like them, until at last all trace and memory of purity and good shall perish, and hell itself shall

⁶⁶⁶ O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁶⁶⁷ Vernon C. Grounds, *The Final State of the Wicked*, *JETS* 24/3 (September 1981), p. 218. R. Anderson, *Human Destiny: After Death - What?* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1913). Carson also notes this recommendation by Spurgeon, and adds his own comments that Anderson is "more satisfactory" than C.S. Lewis in his speculations about the nature of hell, while noting of his book that "I remain uncertain of some of its arguments..." Carson, *Gagging*, p. 532.

lose its power to make the damned more hateful, more corrupt, so hideous and awful shall be the depths of their depravity and guilt.⁶⁶⁸

Anderson then goes on to propose a number of modifications to this understanding of Traditionalism, which come very close to those I have proposed in this chapter:

The “everlasting fire” is not to be the Devil’s kingdom, it will be his prison, not his palace. Amidst so much that is doubtful, this at least is sure... Every creature in the universe shall be in absolute subjection to Almighty God. The underworld is not to be a scene of satanic carnival. The word-pictures which describe the shrieks and curses of the lost on earth, as demons mock their anguish or heap fuel on their torture fires, are relieved from the charge of folly only by the graver charge of profanity. There is no spot in all the Queen’s dominions in which the reign of order is so supreme as in prison. So shall it be in Hell. To speak of this as producing an alleviation of the sinner’s doom betrays the lingering influence of error here condemned. Obedience will be the normal condition there. To speculate how it will be brought about is idle. It may be that the recognition of the perfect justice and goodness of God will lead the lost to accept their doom. Possibly, too... Divine love shall shine out so clearly even amid the fires of judgment, even the prison-house shall join in the refrain, and praise shall issue forth from hell.⁶⁶⁹

Anderson thus seems to come very close to Blocher’s understanding of an end to sin, if obedience is the state of the damned. He also acknowledges the more speculative possibility of the reconciliation of the damned to hell, and even their praise of God. However, one difference is that Anderson speculates that this praise would be for God’s love, whereas I have only suggested it would be for God’s justice exhibited in their judgement. Further, Anderson goes beyond my list of modifications when he speculates that the damned may be able to minister in hell.

There are no idlers in a well-disciplined gaol: in God’s great prison-house is idleness to reign supreme?... Are we to suppose that all the energies of the lost are to be consumed in tasks of aimless punishment?... May we not suppose that in the infinite wisdom of God there are purposes to the accomplishment of which event they will be made to minister?... Why assume that the lost will be battened down in some huge dungeon with no occupation save to bewail forevermore their doom?⁶⁷⁰

One difficulty with this addition is that it is difficult to reconcile with the notion of fixity. However, this addition can be rejected without rejecting the other modifications.

Grounds offers a succinct and I believe valid conclusion for those parts of Anderson’s position I have quoted, the final point excepted: “Confessedly these revelational principles with their undeniable admixture of logical extrapolation fail to remove all

⁶⁶⁸ Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-5.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-143.

difficulties, but at any rate they make hell a doctrine that does not offend the heart and crucify the mind.”⁶⁷¹

The second writer who is suggestive of Reconciliationism is R.W. Dale who argues that the damned will demand punishment, rather than rebelling against it:

conscience will vehemently maintain that the Law is supreme; and in the case supposed will protest that while on the one hand the creature had dishonoured the Law by sin, the Creator has completed the dishonour by refusing to acknowledge the ill-desert of sin.⁶⁷²

Therefore, if the Creator and creature are not to be dishonoured, both will acknowledge the ill-desert of sin. Further

Punishment gives to the sufferer occasion for manifesting humility, patience, and a spirit of penitent submission to the pain which he has deserved by his offences; and if he does not manifest these virtues he incurs fresh guilt. But the duty of manifesting them arises from the fact that by some external force or authority he is being made to suffer the just consequences of his past offences.⁶⁷³

3.5.3.2 Arguments for Reconciliationism

So far I have largely focused on descriptions of the state of the damned. I now turn to examine directly the chief arguments used by Birks, and others, for their view. A central argument for Birks is that all of God’s attributes, including his love and grace, will be directed toward the damned as well as the righteous. This is indicated in the following summary of his own position.

The main idea, in my view of the future, is that eternal punishment, however sure and however solemn, does not exclude every form and kind of goodness or mercy from being shown to those who are punished, but that the King of Heaven retains still the right and power to mingle such actings of Divine mercy and compassion with the fulfilment of his threatenings, in such measure as seems good in His sight. The secondary idea is that of one especial way in which such mercy may be shown.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4.

⁶⁷¹ Grounds, *art. cit.*, p. 219. However it is unclear whether Grounds has realised the true distinctiveness and value of Anderson’s modifications, since in the next sentence he writes, “Help in clearing away rhetorical fog from this area of theology is also provided by Friedrich von Hugel.” [*Ibid.*, p. 219]. However, in Grounds own summary of von Hugel it is clear that von Hugel holds to the continuation of sin and the damned’s lack of lucidity as to the nature of their sin and the justice of their judgement. He speaks for example of “ever-increasing spiritual blindness.” [See *Ibid.*, p. 220, quoting F. von Hugel, “What Do We Mean By Heaven? And What Do We Mean By Hell?” in *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion* (London: J.M. Dent, 1924), pp. 216-221.]

⁶⁷² Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

⁶⁷⁴ Birks, *Atonement*, pp. 39-40, point 8.

Again, he writes

that the perfections of God, who is at once just and gracious, lead to the conclusion that since righteousness, as well as grace, is displayed for ever towards the saved, so grace, mercy, and compassion, in some mysterious form, will be displayed, as well as righteous justice, towards even the worst and guiltiest of the creatures of God.⁶⁷⁵

This point is emphasised in Rowell's comments in summary on Birks

Birks saw more clearly than most that the conflict between universalism and a rigorous understanding of eternal punishment was paralleled by the problem of the relation of God's justice and mercy. His attempted solution may have been paradoxical, but he did at least recognise that the problem existed, and at the same time pointed the way to an emphasis on a corporate as well as an individual salvation.⁶⁷⁶

I will address this issue of whether it is a paradoxical position below. Garratt also holds that this is a strength of this view compared to Traditionalism.

Better still is it, because it honours God by reconciling His attributes, to be able to discover in the deep mine of the Word of God the possibility of the union of love with justice in the Eternal Punishment of sin, as in the Atonement itself we see the union of justice with love.⁶⁷⁷

Further, Birks argues that his position is wedded to what he calls a moderate Calvinism, and would be much weaker if combined with a stricter Calvinism. Thus, when discussing the attitude of the righteous as they contemplate the damned, he comments:

If, indeed, you retain all the other elements of supralapsarian Calvinism, and merely replace unending blasphemies by admiring contemplation of the Divine glory, then I fully allow that the difficulty, relieved on one side, is aggravated on the other; and not just sensibility alone, but the higher sense of justice, might hinder the acquiescence of the holy and righteous in the judgement of the Most High...⁶⁷⁸

Presumably the difficulty that is aggravated for Birks is the idea that God might not love all and seek to save all. However, if one does accept the stricter Calvinist position that God is just in not electing to save, and in not loving all after death either, then Birks' objection collapses.

Birks also discusses the atonement at length holding, as might be expected from his comments on Calvinism, a doctrine of a universal atonement. From this he argues, unusually for an evangelical, that one of the effects of the atonement was to gain mercy for

⁶⁷⁵ Birks, *Victory*, p. 230.

⁶⁷⁶ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁶⁷⁷ Garratt, *Veins*, p. xvi.

⁶⁷⁸ Birks, *Atonement*, p. 36 [Also *Victory*, p. 179]

the damned as well as the righteous, but to a different end. Since I will examine this at length in the next chapter, I will be content simply to note the point here. As with the previous point, if one can hold to Reconciliationism without having to hold that God is gracious to the damned, similarly one can hold to Reconciliationism without holding to a universal atonement and the efficacy of the cross for the damned.

Birks also makes use of an argument from the notion of God's forbearance. He begins by talking about Satan, and then extends his comments to the damned.

There is the widest contrast between [Satan's] present time of permitted and active reign, and the season of punishment,... For the rest, it is not strange, but natural and certain, that sinners should have far less freedom for active wickedness under the revealed and fiery anger of God, than in the times of forbearance and long-suffering. The strange notion is, that under the holy eye and righteous hand of their Judge, they can still rebel even more freely and fiercely than before.⁶⁷⁹

This is the same point that I noted Blocher making at the beginning of this section.

However, the issue that prompted this investigation of Reconciliationism was the annihilationist charge of dualism against classic Traditionalism, and the subsidiary problem of the so-called Abominable Fancy. And I now turn to examining the comments by reconciliationists on these two issues. I begin with the Abominable Fancy. Birks argues forcibly that the righteous will look on the state of the damned in hell without diminishing their blessing. Candlish objects at this point that

[Birks] does not seem to see how completely his arguments can be turned against himself. For what, according to him, do the saved, as they are gathered round the lake, behold? Lost men, suffering eternal shame and misery, yet capable of such a sympathetic and admiring contemplation of the glory of God in redemption, as somehow and somewhat mitigates the sense of their own unintermitting and unending pain. Is not that a spectacle which might shock the saved even more than the other? Might it not raise questions as to the equity of keeping intelligent creatures, capable of so knowing and understanding God, under penal constraint and penal suffering for ever? Is it not, in that view, their mere sensibility that is apt to take offence, but their higher sense of justice.⁶⁸⁰

However, I think that Candlish's objection at this point is unfounded, since it assumes that his own position is correct, and the implication is that the second death is not a just punishment. A unique feature of Birks' position is that the equanimity of the righteous only applies to their attitude to the damned at the second death. Indeed Birks' claims that

⁶⁷⁹ Birks, *Victory*, p. 249.

⁶⁸⁰ Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

the righteous would recoil from the torments of the first death.⁶⁸¹ Again, this seems to undermine Birks' own arguments since if the blessed recoil it would suggest that the punishments of the first death are unjust. This is the same point I have made against annihilationists above. Birks also goes further than simply arguing that the righteous won't have their bliss diminished by the torments of the damned. He goes on to argue that the view of the damned is beneficial to the righteous, in that it is needed to prevent the righteous from falling again.

When the redemption has been so complete, in myriads on myriads of ransomed souls, that no trace of sin, corruption, or mortality remain, how easily might pride creep in once more, and a second and more fatal apostasy ensue, if the lessons of the past, fading ever into the further distance, were not renewed and deepened by the present sight of those in whom is still to be learned the creature's lesson of self-emptiness and utter shame... in this way alone a rescued universe may be upheld for ever in the enjoyment of a blessedness based on perfect humility, and therefore capable of enlarging itself without end. It may be thus through the work of judgement alone, that the bulwarks will be reared of that heavenly city, whose walls are Salvation, and her gates Praise.⁶⁸²

If it is true that the righteous require the vision of the damned for the permanence of their own felicity, then this is a strong argument for the Abominable Fancy. It also provides an argument against Annihilationism, and Rowell notes the similarity with Aquinas at this point.

Aquinas argued against annihilationism because he believed the glory of the blessed to be enhanced by their knowledge of the torments of the damned; Birks suggests that the continued knowledge of the lost by the blessed makes redemption a perpetually revealed, present reality, whereas, if the wicked were annihilated, redemption would only be the recollection of an ever-fading past as far as the blessed were concerned.⁶⁸³

However, unlike Aquinas, Birks' argument assumes an ability of the righteous to sin which is usually rejected in the tradition. Thus Clarke represents the traditional position when he rejects the necessity for the righteous to view the damned, and writes of "the righteous, who, *ex hypothesi*, will no longer need so terrible a warning and deterrent."⁶⁸⁴ However, Clarke argues that the blessed can see the damned and he concludes from this that their punishment cannot be that of classic Traditionalism because it would diminish their bliss. "How can they possibly be happy if that misery has no reformatory or saving

⁶⁸¹ Birks, *Victory*, p. 179.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 184. This view is shared, for example, by Garratt, *Veins*, p. 178.

⁶⁸³ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 126. Cf. Aquinas, *op. cit.*, Suppl. Q. 98, Art. 5, 8, 9, on the attitude of the lost to God and to the blessed; *Victory*, 1870, p. 205.

⁶⁸⁴ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

element in it, but is endless and hopeless?"⁶⁸⁵ In this Clarke is similar to Birks, in arguing that the torments of the first death would diminish the bliss of the righteous, and in proposing the alternative of a hell into which God extends his mercy. This is the same as the objection of annihilationists in the recent debate, and my response is the same: if the punishment is just, it won't diminish the bliss of the righteous, and if it does, then it can't be just. Garratt is also clear that the damned are viewed by the righteous, and he concludes that there must be some benefit gained by the righteous from this: "does it not prove that there is to be seen there what the holy may look upon with pleasure? Is it not explained by what we have already learned from Scripture, - that in eternal punishment God's love is able to make men seek His name?"⁶⁸⁶ Certainly any argument for a benefit for the righteous in the continuation of hell serves as an argument against Annihilationism since the extinction of the damned would be to deprive the righteous of that benefit. However, on Blocher's position the divine attribute present in hell is his justice, and not his mercy, and any benefit to the righteous comes from a perception of this virtue.

I now turn directly to the discussion of dualism and, having noted the relevant discussions in the literature, I will argue for three conclusions. First, I will argue that Reconciliationism does avoid classic Traditionalism's problem of dualism, and that this in itself may encourage annihilationists to consider it. Second, I will argue that it is a better response to the problem of damnation dualism than Annihilationism, and that this is a further reason for annihilationists to consider it. Finally, I will argue that Reconciliationism is not an incoherent position on this issue as some critics have claimed.

Several reconciliationists discuss the issue of dualism directly. Birks refers to the victory over evil, and refers to this victory in the title of his major book on the subject of hell. "The purpose of His judgement cannot be to stereotype and eternize [sic] active rebellion against God, but to abolish it for evermore."⁶⁸⁷ He does however acknowledge that this is not an entire 'solution' to the problem of evil. To his imaginary interlocutor

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁶⁸⁶ Garratt, *Veins*, p. 178.

⁶⁸⁷ Birks, *Victory*, p. 179.

he writes, "I cannot hope to give your perplexity full and entire relief."⁶⁸⁸ James Orr frames his very brief comments that tentatively propose a form of Reconciliationism as an answer to this problem. Orr writes

The veil, in Scripture, falls on what seems to be a duality, yet not to the exclusion of hints, even more, of a future final unification - a gathering up of all things in Christ as Head - when God is once more "all in all."⁶⁸⁹ Such language would seem to imply at least a cessation of active opposition to the will of God - an acknowledgement universally of His authority and rule, - a reconciliation, in some form, on the part even of those outside the blessedness of the Kingdom with the order of the universe.⁶⁹⁰

Clarke also sees Reconciliationism as a solution to the problem of the dualism of classic Traditionalism. He begins by highlighting the problem:

[I]t is so generally admitted that the counsel of the Lord is the redemption of man from the power of evil, that a view of the future destinies of man which practically makes Satan triumph, and *his* counsel prevail over that of the Almighty, or at any rate, establishes an endless dualism of good and evil, seems practically impossible.⁶⁹¹

Clarke also quotes Westcott to this effect.

Or does it [eternal life] leave room for existence finally alien from God and unsubdued by His Love, for evil, as evil, enduring as God *is*? To suggest this last alternative seems to admit the possibility of a dualism in a form wholly inconceivable. The present existence of evil carries with it difficulties to which nature offers no solution; but to suppose that evil once introduced into the world is for ever, appears to be at variance with the essential conception of God as revealed to us.⁶⁹²

Clarke sees Reconciliationism is a more adequate solution to the problem of dualism, and frames this notion as a partial answer to a question set by Westcott.

[T]he Saviour-Judge theory, though it by no means professes to explain everything, does really seem to go some way towards the solution of the question he mentions as being yet unsolved, viz.: How the ideal of a final Divine unity is to be reached in harmony with the justice of God and the obligations of man's responsibility.⁶⁹³

Although Clarke and the other nineteenth century reconciliationists differ from Blocher in holding to the extension of God's love and mercy into hell, I think that their claim about their position being a better resolution of the problem of dualism can also be made for Blocher's more restrictive position.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶⁸⁹ Acts 3:21; 1 Cor.15:24-28; Eph.1:10; Phil.2:9-11.

⁶⁹⁰ Orr, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-8.

⁶⁹¹ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁶⁹² Westcott, *Historic Faith*, p. 149, 5th ed., quoted by Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁶⁹³ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Clarke is commenting on Westcott, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-153, which he calls a "remarkable passage".

However, with the extinction of the damned, Annihilationism also avoids the problem of permanent sin dualism, even if it has the problems of a temporary dualism. I now want to examine whether Reconciliationism is a better resolution than Annihilationism of the problem of damnation dualism (the problem of some being permanently damned, whether in torment or extinguished). Clarke argues that it is a less dualistic solution than Annihilationism.

To expel the evil which Tertullian named the great interloper, must ever remain the aim and the effort of the eternal righteousness, or evil will become a sort of naturalised or legitimated citizen of eternity. But how is it to be expelled? There is the way of Annihilation - ... And if this were the method of cure, who would be the victor - God or sin? Would not the victory remain with the evil which compelled God to uncreate His own creation?⁶⁹⁴

Thus Clarke certainly hopes, and probably expects, his view to be accepted by Annihilationists:

[It] would probably be welcomed by Annihilationists as relieving their theory from the enormous difficulty of holding that the resurrection of the wicked is only with a view to their undergoing the full punishment they deserve, and, when that is over, suffering extinction of being.⁶⁹⁵

Helm offers a brief account of a traditional Calvinist understanding of a purpose of hell, which Annihilationism would not be able to maintain so easily with the extinction of the damned, and which goes some way to providing a purpose for hell, and thus relieving damnation dualism. Helm begins by mentioning the problem which I have called damnation dualism:

[F]rom the point of view of the original creation, and looked at in isolation, hell may be an anomaly. For the Creator intended to create an all-good universe, and did so, and hell is the final culmination of the sinful departure of creatures from the original order of things.

But hell is not an anomaly from the point of view of God's purpose or decree. For it was God's nature to punish sin in hell. It is required by God's holiness, and by the enormity of sin as rebellion against God. So that although according to Scripture hell is a place of indescribable woe, nevertheless in hell, no less than in heaven, the justice of God reigns. Heaven is founded upon the justice of God in accepting Christ's righteousness on behalf of sinners; hell is founded on the justice of God in punishing sinners... Older Christian writers developed this thought in a way which is unfamiliar to most Christians today, but in a way which is nonetheless scriptural. They claimed that, far from being an anomaly, or the triumph of evil, hell demonstrates the justice of God in a public, unmistakable

⁶⁹⁴ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

way. His justice against sin is manifest in the punishing of the sinner, just as his grace is demonstrated in providing his Son as a substitute for those who are as undeserving of the saving goodness of God as are any of those who are in hell.⁶⁹⁶

The ACUTE report notes this as the main traditionalist response, and quotes Bray as an example of it:

If conditionalists recoil from eternal conscious punishment on the grounds that it seems ultimately wanton and pointless, traditionalists reply that it does have a positive aim - namely, to glorify God as a righteous Judge. Bray again articulates this view concisely: 'If the non-elect have no hope of salvation and God does not want them to suffer unduly, why were they ever created in the first place? Their existence must serve some purpose, and once that is admitted the view that their eternal punishment glorifies the justice of God seems perfectly logical.'⁶⁹⁷

Blocher puts forward this argument as an improvement on Annihilationism but with greater hesitancy: "If we may cautiously trust the larger hope that the existence of the lost shall not amount to a total waste, neither for the universe, nor for God, nor for themselves, it may shed some encouraging light on the problem of evil."⁶⁹⁸ His argument is thus that his position is not only more faithful to Scripture but an improved response to the problem of evil than Annihilationism, without claiming to be a solution of it. Blocher makes the same point in quoting Salmond who comments on the Greek mind's preference for unending torment over extinction, and commenting: "Would annihilation be a better fate, objectively, and even subjectively, for the lost themselves?... This pagan preference,... may not have been so far misguided."⁶⁹⁹ However, he continues that hell "remains a tragedy."⁷⁰⁰ In an earlier essay he offers a slightly more confident sounding summary of his position, and the implication that follows:

[W]e can correct... inadequate ideas of eternal punishment. Scripture, for instance, never suggests the idea that it is a divine defeat, or that sin continues, that evil perpetuates itself in Gehenna. On the contrary, evil, vanquished and crushed by judgment shall no longer exist!... *all* human beings, without any exception, in the blaze of that Day, shall see at last in truth. They will render to God the homage he requires: a sincere Amen assenting to judgment. The ungodly shall condemn their own ungodliness, in agreement with God; they will wish for nothing else than for punishment as they will *see* that punishment alone can right them with God; the consuming desire of their conscience shall be to satisfy the divine justice. It will be *good* for them to glorify God in and through their judgment; they will thus fulfil, in

⁶⁹⁶ Helm, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

⁶⁹⁷ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106, quoting Bray, *art. cit.*, p. 23. Another rationale for the continuation of hell is that mooted by Birks, Blanchard and Spanner, noted above, p. 118, where hell serves to prevent the righteous from sinning. However, the ACUTE report rightly emphasises the speculative nature of this proposal. ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p.108.

⁶⁹⁸ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p.311.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311. The Salmond quote from Plutarch is in *The Christian Doctrine*, p. 610.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.312. Blocher refuses to be pushed to "a non-Biblical *felix culpa*" position. [*Ibid.*, p. 312.]

spite of a lost life, the essential calling of all creatures - to glorify the Lord - and they will know it. It might happen that this doctrine be more merciful, in the end, to them, than theories which have been framed to elude the clarity of biblical teaching.⁷⁰¹

If this argument about the purpose of hell is accepted, and I agree that it is 'perfectly logical', and if the extinction of the damned would lessen the clarity of the demonstration as the memory of the damned faded after their extinction, then this would provide a further reason for holding that Reconciliationism is a better response to damnation dualism than Annihilationism. Certainly Reconciliationism does not suffer from the dualism of waste which Annihilationism does, and if it is persuasive it would provide a strong reason for annihilationists preferring this modified form of Traditionalism over Annihilationism.

An argument could still be mounted that any unending form of hell creates a dualism in the nature of God: before creation there was no wrath exercised by God, but if hell is unending then there has been an eternal change in God since he eternally has to display his wrath. However, the extinction or transformation of the objects of his wrath is only a partial response since the state of 'having been wrathful' and the memory of past wrath would remain. Clarke also notes that another reason that extinction is not an adequate answer to the problem of dualism is that God will remember the damned.

"The annihilated creature would be indeed gone for ever - good and evil, shame and misery, penalty and pain would for him be all ended with his being: but it would not be so with God - out of His memory the name of the man could never perish..."⁷⁰²

Further, there is still Bray's incisive question to be faced: "why were [the non-elect] ever created in the first place?"⁷⁰³ On the assumption that it had a purpose, then the glorification of his justice is a logical reason, and one that may also require the permanence of his wrath.

A final issue is whether Reconciliationism is a coherent position at this point, or whether the different judgements as to what sort of doctrine it reflects inherent confusion, or even contradiction. Birks was prepared to talk about his view having elements of paradox: "May we not rather believe that their condition will be a mysterious paradox..."⁷⁰⁴ This is

⁷⁰¹ Blocher, "The Scope of Redemption and Modern Theology," in *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, p.103.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

⁷⁰³ Bray, *art. cit.*, p. 23.

⁷⁰⁴ Birks, *Victory*, p. 195.

also Rowell's tentative verdict on Birks' position: "His attempted solution may have been paradoxical,..."⁷⁰⁵ However Birks uses the term 'paradox' confusingly. In the following quote he defines paradox as a type of contradiction and then argues that his position is not in fact paradoxical. Thus, Birks summarises Candlish's second objection, "Your next objection is that my view involves a moral paradox, the possibility of two opposite and contradictory experiences co-existing in the same man, and for ever."⁷⁰⁶ Birks responds that this is a contrast, but not a contradiction. He points out that God has the contrast of both justice and mercy, and that humanity can too. It is therefore uncertain what exactly Birks is admitting when he admits to 'a mysterious paradox'. I think it likely that he does not mean an absolute paradox to which there is no resolution, but a seeming paradox from our current perspective in this life. Blocher's understanding is therefore probably different from Birks' in that he probably is claiming an absolute paradox. John Wenham describes Blocher's paper as "devout and difficult" and concludes a very brief summary of its position with this comment: "This is all very paradoxical and seems to me to owe more to the doctors of the church than to holy Scripture."⁷⁰⁷ Blocher himself states that hell "remains tragedy,"⁷⁰⁸ and that he believes there is "no rational solution of the riddle."⁷⁰⁹ By this he means not just that there is no rational solution that can be found in this life, but there is no rational solution at all. Certainly in his work on the problem of evil he seems to conclude that there is no solution.⁷¹⁰ However I would argue differently, that the position should be rejected if it really is ultimately paradoxical, but that in fact it isn't, and can therefore be accepted.

I turn now to the strengths of Blocher's position. As I noted above, for Blocher the greatest strength of this position is that it avoids the problem of sin dualism with which annihilationists charge the traditionalist position: there is no eternity of sinning, but rather the damned are reconciled. I have argued that the annihilationists' objection to the dualism of the classic traditionalist position is valid in so far as it points to the problem of continuing sin in hell. However I have argued that Annihilationism, while avoiding the problem of there being a place of permanent rebellion against the rule of God, does not

⁷⁰⁵ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁷⁰⁶ Birks, *Atonement*, p. 27.

⁷⁰⁷ Wenham, *Facing*, p. 258.

⁷⁰⁸ Blocher, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁷¹⁰ Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross* (Leicester: IVP, 1994; French edition 1990).

entirely avoid the problem of dualism itself, since there remains what I have termed damnation dualism. The challenge therefore remains: "Orthodox tradition, we feel, has not paid enough attention to the grand proclamation of fullness in the New Testament, recapitulation and universal reconciliation..."⁷¹¹ Blocher's position does, I believe, take better account of this theological theme of universal reconciliation than either classic Traditionalism or Annihilationism, and thereby gives a less dualistic account of hell than either of these positions. In its denial of continuing sin and in the notion of lucidity of the damned, it offers a better account than Traditionalism, and in the notion of reconciliation it offers a better account than Annihilationism since the reconciliation of the damned seems to be a good which their extinction would lose.

I have also argued that these aspects of Blocher's thesis also offer a different account of the severity of hell, and thus has implications for the other major annihilationist criticism of classical Traditionalism: its injustice. If the damned do not continue to sin and rebel against their sentence but rather praise God, then this is a relative good and would presumably bring pleasure to the damned. However, lucidity would also serve to sharpen the *poena damni*, and indeed I have argued that the continuation of sin in classic Traditionalism actually serves to undermine much of this aspect of the torment of the damned. Therefore this might also be a more severe punishment. However, I think that for most annihilationists this conception would be considered a mitigation of Traditionalism, because their underlying objection is to the pointlessness and therefore brutality of the traditional hell. Even though the pains of a reconciliationist hell are sharper, they are also more moral, since more just, and with a point, in that they serve to emphasise the justice of God.

I have also speculated that Annihilationism may be in part a reactive doctrine, defined as much by its rejection of Traditionalism. I would therefore hope that by offering a modified Traditionalism annihilationists might be encouraged to consider their position less favourably. Garratt makes clear the strategy of this thesis in proposing Reconciliationism as a means of responding to criticisms from annihilationists of the classic traditional view. Garratt states that his own view is basically Traditionalism stripped of human additions. "The Eternal Punishment of unforgiven sinners is a

⁷¹¹ Blocher, *Everlasting Punishment*, p. 289.

Chapter 4: Hell and the Atonement

In this chapter I turn to examine links between the doctrine of hell and the doctrine of the atonement. These links are rarely discussed in the current debate, and where they are the discussion is usually brief, but on the basis of them some traditionalists and some annihilationists conclude they provide arguments in support of their position and against the other. The paucity of discussion is highlighted by Edward Fudge: "The literature concerning final punishment contains a number of surprises, and one of the greatest is the scant attention given to the death of Jesus Christ."⁷¹³ The value of and need for further study of these links is stated by the ACUTE report: "... questions of hell are never far from questions of soteriology - that is, the doctrine of salvation and theories of atonement. Although detailed exploration of this link lie beyond our remit here, we believe it to be an important and fertile area for further research."⁷¹⁴ The importance of this neglected area is stated by Guillebaud: "It is impossible to begin to understand eternal punishment, if it is considered in isolation from... the Doctrine of the Atonement."⁷¹⁵ Kendall Harmon's judgement in the final paragraph of his essay on Fudge is that, "Like so many other doctrines, hell is finally best understood in the light of the cross."⁷¹⁶

In the discussion of the links between the two doctrines in the literature, the arguments are sometimes similar to those about the justice of hell, since a similar logic is usually applied to the justice of the punishment of Christ on the cross and the punishment of the damned in hell. However, I will discuss these links here, rather than in Chapter 2, because whereas the issues of justice and dualism are common explicit concerns of the debate, this issue is less common and is an area I want to develop since I believe that it offers strong, and possibly decisive, arguments for the debate. A further reason for discussing this issue here is that, having now fully expounded the modified Traditionalism which I have termed Reconciliationism, I can also examine the links between it and the doctrine of the atonement.

⁷¹³ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 215. (Cf. the whole of chapter 12: 'Golgotha and Gehenna.') The same quote stands at the head of the same chapter of the 1994 edition of Fudge's book, *2nd ed., op. cit.*, p.135.

⁷¹⁴ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁷¹⁵ Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁷¹⁶ Harmon, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

I will divide this chapter into three main sections. In the first section I will expound the arguments related to the doctrine of the atonement as they are used in the debate about hell. I will begin by briefly reviewing the logic of the link between the two doctrines, noting that this link is upheld by a number of writers on both sides of the debate. I will then assess the arguments used by both sides on the basis of this link. The arguments run in two directions: from the understanding of hell for one's doctrine of the atonement, and from the understanding of the atonement for one's doctrine of hell. My chief conclusions will be that, on the basis of the link widely held on both sides in the debate, the annihilationist position leads to unorthodox doctrines of the incarnation and the resurrection. In particular, I will argue, first, that Annihilationism entails a separation of the natures of Christ at death, and an annihilation of the human nature of Christ, which is counter to the Chalcedonian doctrine of the incarnation. Second, Annihilationism entails that the 'resurrection' of Christ was not a true resurrection but rather some sort of re-creation, involving a new incarnation. The first of these conclusions is, I believe, the more compelling, but either conclusion would probably be considered unorthodox, and thus unacceptable, by an evangelical annihilationist, and if proven would be a strong reason for the rejection of their doctrine of hell. One strategy for annihilationists to avoid these conclusions is to reject the link between hell and the cross which underlies the arguments. In the second section of this chapter I will argue that the rejection of this link would raise further problems for annihilationists. In particular I will argue that the denial of such a link may require the rejection of a doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement, which evangelicals have traditionally held. In order to establish this point, I will survey the nature of the link between the doctrine of the atonement and hell in three writers who have been highly influential for many evangelicals: Calvin, John Owen and Jonathan Edwards, along with briefer comments on Luther and, from the recent debate, Packer. I will argue that the link is strongest in Owen and Edwards, which may be a result of their developed advocacy of a doctrine of limited atonement, but that each writer believes that there is such a link as to raise these problems for annihilationists. I will therefore conclude that annihilationists are required to reject the doctrine of penal substitution if they are to avoid the link between the atonement and hell, with its unorthodox consequences. In the third section of this chapter I will examine the implications of Reconciliationism for the doctrine of the atonement. My aim here is twofold. My first aim is to establish a link between the cross and Reconciliationism. My argument against Annihilationism in this chapter, based on the

link established by penal substitution, would be weakened if I could not establish a link for my alternative doctrine of hell, since it would offer no doctrinal advantage at his point. My second aim is to suggest that Reconciliationism might offer a closer equivalence between the experience of Christ on the cross and the damned in hell than classic Traditionalism, and that this is a further argument in favour of this alternative doctrine of hell. Therefore, in this third section I will begin by expounding reconciliationist writing on this link, which is relatively extensive in comparison to the recent debate, particularly in the writing of Birks. I will argue that, although equivalence cannot be maintained on the nineteenth century form of Reconciliationism, it can be by the form I have developed based on Blocher's writing.

There is no common or settled terminology in the literature for discussing the link between hell and the atonement. I will use the word 'link' to refer to any such elements of the two doctrines which are used to connect them and so establish an argument from one to the other. As I will argue, much the most important link is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. I will use the adjectives 'strong' and 'weak' to qualify those links, where a 'stronger link' is one where the arguments from one doctrine to another are more firmly established. I will use the term 'equivalence' to refer to that degree of strength of link such that Annihilationists are required to draw the unorthodox conclusions I will argue for.

4.1 The Arguments in the Literature

4.2 The Basis of the Link Between the Doctrines of Hell and of the Atonement

I begin by examining the link between the doctrines of hell and the atonement as established in the recent literature. The logic of the link is summarised by Morey (his second and third points being particularly relevant to this discussion):

... the vicarious atonement of Christ is crucial to our understanding of divine punishment. First, the fact of the atonement reveals the necessity of divine punishment for sin. Second, Christ took the punishment for sin which His people would have suffered. Third, the nature of Christ's vicarious punishment will be a good indication of the nature of divine punishment of rebel sinners.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁷ R.A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), pp. 101-102.

The middle term in the link between the atonement and hell is thus a doctrine of vicarious atonement, which is synonymous here with penal substitution. The relevance of this doctrine of penal substitution is thus that it is usually held to establish a strong link between hell and the atonement. This doctrine of penal substitution is held by the majority of evangelicals. Packer writes of

a belief which, by and large, is a distinguishing mark of the world-wide evangelical fraternity: namely, the belief that Christ's death on the cross had the character of penal substitution, and that it was in virtue of this fact that it brought salvation to mankind.⁷¹⁸

Therefore the link that is established by penal substitution is held in common by most traditionalists and annihilationists. On the traditionalist side the most extensive discussion of the link between hell and the atonement in the recent debate are four pages in Peterson.⁷¹⁹ He concludes, "The cross sheds light on the fate of the wicked, because on the cross the sinless Son of God suffered that fate. He bore the retributive punishment of hell in being separated from the Father's love (subtraction) and in enduring God's wrath (addition)."⁷²⁰ Peterson's distinction between the two elements of retributive punishment draws on an earlier discussion which serves to highlight how tight he believes the link is between the experience of hell and the cross, since the distinctive elements of Christ's punishment correspond to those suffered by the damned. This quote also shows that the argument can be run back from the nature of hell to the nature of the cross.

The traditional understanding of the retributive punishment of hell involves two elements: separation from God (*poena damni*, the punishment of the damned) and the positive infliction of torments in body and soul (*poena sensus*, the punishment of sense). The former is subtraction of desired blessing, the latter addition of undesired punishment... At the cross Jesus suffered the retributive punishment of hell for sinners. He endured both the subtraction of the Father's love and the addition of God's wrath.⁷²¹

It is on the basis of this link that writers on both sides of the recent debate speak of Christ suffering hell. Examples on the traditionalist side, as well as Peterson above, includes Blanchard who states that "Jesus suffered everything the Bible means when it describes hell as a pit, a prison, darkness and a lake of fire, and he felt in his own body and soul all

⁷¹⁸ Packer, "What Did The Cross Achieve? The Logic Of Penal Substitution." *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974), p. 3. [Italics original.]

⁷¹⁹ Peterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-216.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

of hell's shame, contempt, punishment, banishment, separation, deprivation, torment and agony."⁷²² Dixon writes:

We realise that the atoning work of Christ by which He turned away the wrath of God is to be understood in more than a quantitative fashion. But is there no quantitative dimension to His becoming sin for us? It seems to be consistent with the New Testament teaching to say that Christ bore our hell on the cross.⁷²³

It is therefore a surprise to read in the ACUTE report that "Traditionalists have tended to... [state] that the death of Christ was a one-off conscious punishment which cannot be used as an analogy for eternal conscious punishment after final judgment."⁷²⁴ This is not simply inaccurate with respect to the recent debate since this claimed equivalence is well established in the tradition as will be demonstrated with my study of some leading theologians of the past.

On the annihilationist side, Atkinson has a brief section entitled *The Suffering and Death of Christ* which he begins with the observation: "It has often been forgotten that we have in history at the centre of our faith an open example and illustration of the punishment of sin."⁷²⁵ Fudge writes at greater length and he quotes Berkhof appreciatively, "that Christ our substitute suffered the punishment due to us, and in the our place met all the requirements of the law,"⁷²⁶ and Boettner who wrote that Jesus "voluntarily took our place and suffered the penalty which was due to us and so made atonement for our sin."⁷²⁷ Earlier in the same section Fudge introduced this view as that held by "Orthodox theologians."⁷²⁸ Fudge argues that the implication which springs from the doctrine of penal substitution is that "To use the familiar language, Jesus has suffered *hell* for His people - the very hell they would have suffered had He not taken their place."⁷²⁹ It is this logic that leads Fudge to ask one of the two questions that will constitute the core of this section: "If Jesus' death "reveals" God's last judgement, if his death was "for sin" and "instead of sinner,"[sic] if it entailed the penalty and curse and condemnation of sin pronounced throughout the Bible, what does the cross teach us about final

⁷²² Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁷²³ Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

⁷²⁴ ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁷²⁵ Atkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁷²⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Vicarious Atonement Through Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936), p. 111, quoted by Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁷²⁷ Loraine Boettner, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), p. 92, quoted by *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁷²⁸ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227. Fudge goes on to argue that the reason that Gehenna is not used in the New Testament Epistles is for precisely this reason: a more accurate 'picture' of hell is provided by the cross. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

punishment?"⁷³⁰ The other question is the reverse of this: what does one's doctrine of final punishment teach us about the cross?

4.2.1 The Annihilationist Arguments

As Fudge's reference to "scant attention" suggests, there has been relatively little discussion on the basis of this linkage. Fudge's own discussion is a rare exception, devoting a whole chapter to the question, entitled *Golgotha and Gehenna (Jesus' Death and the Punishment of the Lost)*, and I will look at it in some detail.⁷³¹ I would distinguish two types of argument made by Fudge and other annihilationists on the basis of this equivalence between the cross and hell. First, there are the negative arguments that the cross undermines Traditionalism. Second, there are the positive arguments that the cross favours Annihilationism.

4.2.1.1 The 'Negative' Argument: the Atonement Undermines Traditionalism

In turning to the negative argument that the cross undermines a traditionalist doctrine of hell, I will first expound the usual traditionalist argument for the link between the cross and hell, to which annihilationists are responding and rejecting. This traditionalist argument from the atonement shares the same assumption as that used by annihilationists about the link between the doctrines, but draws a different conclusion on the basis of it. I will call this traditionalist argument the 'classic' argument since it has a long pedigree and is widely used, and builds on the logic of the 'classic' argument for an unending hell. The argument can be run in two directions. First, from the atonement to hell, it can be briefly summarised: since it was a divine person who died on the cross, the penalty for sin must have been infinite. If the penalty for sin is infinite then for a finite person the punishment of hell must be eternal. Fudge sets out the lines of this argument and explains the reason why annihilationists have often, wrongly as he argues, been understood as denying the divinity of Christ.

Traditionalists had argued for Christ's divinity on the ground that only such a One could offer the infinite sacrifice needed to satisfy justice in the case of sin against the infinite God. Arians and Socinians reasoned in the opposite direction. Denying

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 12, pp. 215-234.

Christ's deity, they consistently dismissed the need for an infinite atonement, then the threat of infinite punishment - which traditionalists said required everlasting conscious torment for finite men.⁷³²

It is this link that explains the often noted association of unorthodox Christologies and annihilationist beliefs about hell (although the annihilationist beliefs are usually those of extinction at physical death, which is not the form of Annihilationism I am studying in this thesis). Walker develops this point, and I quote him at length because he then rehearses the underlying logic:

Both with the Socinians and the English Arians a doctrine of the Trinity in which Christ is not very God of very God is accompanied by doubts about, or the denial of, the eternity of hell. There is a logical connection between these two heresies, as William Dodwell, in refuting the English Arian, Whiston, pointed out. In the orthodox doctrine of the Redemption, the expiation by the crucifixion is considered infinite because it was a God who suffered and died; infinite expiation was necessary to atone for the infinite offence of man's sin; the infinite offence of man's sin is shown by its deserving eternal punishment. If, as in the Arian doctrine, Christ was not fully God, then His expiation, if there was an expiation (which the Socinians denied), was not infinite, and there is no necessary reason to suppose that the offence of man's sin is infinite and deserves eternal punishment. This is not of course proof that hell is not eternal, but it does remove one of the most serious obstacles to such a proof.⁷³³

Shedd claims an even stronger, logical, link between the two doctrines:

The doctrine of Christ's vicarious atonement, logically, stands or falls with that of endless punishment. Historically, it has stood or fallen with it. The incarnation of Almighty God, in order to make the remission of sin possible, is one of the strongest arguments for the eternity and infinity of penal suffering.⁷³⁴

Second, this 'classic' argument can be run the other way from the doctrine of hell to that of the atonement. Here the argument, briefly stated, is that Christ was able to bear the infinite punishment of hell in a finite period of time because of his divine nature. A typical statement of this argument is from Grudem:

If we had to pay the penalty for our own sins, we would have to suffer eternally in separation from God. However, Jesus did not suffer eternally... Jesus was able to bear all the wrath of God against our sin and to bear it to the end. No mere man could ever have done this, but by virtue of the union of divine and human natures in himself, Jesus was able to bear all the wrath of God against sin and bear it to the end.⁷³⁵

This is the most common version of the argument, and uses what I will call a 'divine multiplier', whereby the sufferings of Christ in his human nature are held to be of infinite

⁷³² *Ibid.*, p. 396, and he footnotes Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁷³³ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁷³⁴ Shedd, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

value because of the union with the divine nature. Berkhof puts it more succinctly: "In a short period of time He bore the infinite wrath against sin to the very end and came out victoriously. This was possible for Him only because of his exalted nature."⁷³⁶ Letham offers a variant of this, where the union with the divine nature means that Christ's experience is actually more intense, although this is a rarer position:

The death due to us from our transgression of God's law is an eternal death that involves everlasting exclusion from the presence of God, yet Christ suffered on the cross for only three hours, and the sufferings of his earthly life lasted for only thirty three years. Is there not a huge disparity between the two? How can he be said to have endured our penalty in our place if his sufferings are so disproportionate to what ours were to be?... The reality is surely that Christ's sufferings were infinitely more intense. The prime factor is that he is the Son of God.⁷³⁷

Shedd offers a brief summary of both variants of this argument, in a longer discussion of the issues: "The suffering of an absolutely infinite person in a finite duration is, therefore, a greater suffering in degree and dignity, than is the suffering of a multitude of finite persons in an endless but not strictly infinite time [because only *parte post*]."⁷³⁸

In response to this 'classic' argument, there have been two main annihilationist arguments. First, some argue that the traditionalist logic is faulty. Fudge quotes Edward White to state, rather than argue, that the classic traditionalist answer to this question is inadequate.

If it be asserted that it was the presence of the Godhead within [Christ] which dispensed with the infliction of endless pains, through the substitution of an Infinite Majesty for the infinitely extended misery of a finite being, we reply, that this is an 'afterthought of theology' which finds no place in the authoritative record.⁷³⁹

In fact Fudge is critical of the whole terminology of finite and infinite that has formed such an important part of the classic traditionalist argument. In his chapter on the Atonement, Fudge states and then counters a part of this classic argument.

Some protest that Christ's death was not a true pattern of the judgement awaiting sinners in hell, since Jesus was an infinite person and could absorb infinite punishment in a single moment. Finite sinners ['finite' with reference to their natures, not their sin], this argument goes, will require conscious punishment in infinite duration for justice to have its way. The whole logic of "finite" and

⁷³⁵ Grudem, *op. cit.*, pp. 577-8.

⁷³⁶ Berkhof, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁷³⁷ Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), p. 133.

⁷³⁸ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 1980 [1889]), vol. 2, p. 461.

⁷³⁹ White, *op. cit.*, p. 241, quoted by Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

"infinite" punishment and victims is totally without biblical basis, springing instead from medieval speculation grounded in feudalistic canons of justice.⁷⁴⁰ Second, some annihilationists respond by pointing out that the cross wasn't a traditionalist hell. John Wenham notes that "Many stress that on the cross Jesus suffered the pains we deserve. But, though he suffered physical torture, the utter dereliction of separation from the Father, and death, he did not suffer endless pain."⁷⁴¹ Atkinson concludes from the nature of Christ's death that Traditionalism is in error: "If He bore the punishment of our sins, that punishment cannot under any circumstances be eternal conscious suffering or misery, for He never suffered this and it is impossible that he could have."⁷⁴² Rather, "... the facts of the suffering and death of Christ Jesus prove conclusively that the punishment of sin is death in its natural sense of deprivation of life."⁷⁴³

Before turning to this positive argument for Annihilationism, I want to argue that, for my criticisms of Annihilationism on the basis of this link to stand, it is not necessary for me to defend Traditionalism's 'classic' arguments. This is for three reasons: first, the task I have set myself in this thesis is to offer a doctrinal assessment of Annihilationism. I have offered a modified Traditionalism to strengthen the argument against Annihilationism at certain points, given what I have suggested is its reactive quality to certain errors in the classic traditionalist position. However, successfully defending Traditionalism, even in a modified form, is not required for a successful criticism. However I think that there are reasons for holding that annihilationists face particular difficulties at this point which traditionalists may avoid.

Thus, second, there is a qualitative difference between the annihilationist and traditionalist arguments on the basis of equivalence. If the annihilationist holds that Christ suffered hell then this has to include extinction, since it is part of the punishment of the damned. However extinction cannot be a punishment of degrees: it isn't possible to be partially extinguished. Therefore since Christ has to be extinguished this necessarily leads to the chief arguments I make against Annihilationism. However torment is amenable of degrees

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 232. The first part of the classic traditionalist position, to which Fudge seems to allude when he refers to 'medieval speculation' and 'feudalistic canons of justice', is that the gravity of sin is determined by the dignity of the person sinned against. Since God possesses infinite dignity, any sin against him is therefore worthy of infinite punishment. I discussed this in chapter two.

⁷⁴¹ Wenham, *Case*, p. 185.

⁷⁴² Atkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

in intensity and duration. Therefore it may at least be possible that Christ could have experienced a unique intensity of torment which is equivalent to the unending torment of a traditionalist hell. (I am not sure that a traditionalist even needs to argue this if they hold that Christ's divine nature means that any suffering in his human nature is potentially of infinite value as a penal substitute. Certainly this would break the equivalence of important details of the punishments, but it would not necessarily require the denial of penal substitution. As I will note below writers like Owen and Edwards are happy to talk about differences between the accidents of the punishments of Christ and the damned, including duration, while affirming substantial equivalence. A further option is that it may be possible to have as full an experience of eternity as the damned in a finite period of time. This can be approached in two ways, each relying on a different psychological insight. First, there is a suggestion by Edwards, which I will note below, that it may be possible to experience an eternal punishment through the exercise of sympathetic imagination. Second, rather than Christ experiencing an infinite punishment, it may be that the damned subjectively experience a finite punishment which objectively continues unendingly. Building on this speculation in the last chapter, it is then easier to maintain equivalence if it only needs to be argued that Christ had to experience a finite punishment.)

Third, I will argue below that, while it is possible to conceive of the divine second person of the Trinity experiencing at least the *type* of punishment of a traditionalist hell, if not its duration, it is impossible to conceive of him experiencing the type of punishment of an annihilationist hell. Christ could experience torment in his human nature, and the separation of his human body and soul, but it is impossible to 'experience' the extinction of his human nature in the way the damned would since of necessity the divine nature remains alive and conscious. Of course, it remains a problem for the traditionalist to explain how Christ could experience a traditionalist hell of unending duration, but it seems to me that difficult though this may be it is not necessarily impossible. I will therefore not attempt a defence of the 'classic' arguments as part of this assessment of Annihilationism, although I believe that such a defence may be possible.

4.2.1.2 The 'Positive' Argument: the Atonement Supports Annihilationism

The positive case for Annihilationism is just the positive side of the second argument above, and argues that the cross *was* an annihilationist hell. Although Fudge doesn't directly say that Christ's human nature was extinguished, his references to the death of Christ clearly imply this, given his understanding of death. Thus he writes

[Christ] suffered torment of body and soul. More than that, He drained the cup of God's wrath, passively enduring the simultaneous draining of His own life into total death."⁷⁴⁴ Again, "The Bible exhausts the vocabulary of dying in speaking of what happened to Jesus. He "*died* for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3). He "*laid down His life*" [*psyche*]" (John 10:15). He was *destroyed* (Matt 27:20, KJV) or *killed* (Acts 3:15). Jesus compared his own death to the *dissolution* of a kernel of wheat... (John 12:23-26). Jesus "*poured out His life [psyche] unto death*" and in so doing was "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12).⁷⁴⁵

That extinction is the meaning Fudge gives to these statements seems to be assumed in the following quote where he in turn assumes that many of his readers will find this conclusion difficult to accept. He argues that:

We naturally recoil from such a thought, that the Son of God could truly have perished - even for a moment. Yet is this not the same difficulty we face in accepting Jesus' true kenosis and humiliation in becoming a man? (Phil. 2:5-10). In the first century the Docetics tried to avoid the implications of saying that the incarnate God truly died, but the apostolic witnesses refused to yield an inch (1 John 5:6-10).⁷⁴⁶

Given the significance of this conclusion, I will try and spell out exactly what it is that Fudge is trying to say. First, by "perish" he certainly means extinction. Not only does Fudge head this section "Jesus' Death Involved Total Destruction", but in an earlier paragraph he equates Jesus' death with a return to non-being:

In the beginning God gave man being instead of non-being, and He had warned then that sin would bring death in the place of life (Gen. 2:17). From the very first the wages of sin was *death*, and Jesus underwent the very same sentence pronounced in the primal Garden.

Second, by "Son of God" he does *not* mean the divine second person of the Trinity in disincarnate form. In a quotation immediately before Fudge's conclusion above is the sentence: "as God He could not die."⁷⁴⁷ Thus the Son of God would seem to be the incarnate, two-natured, God-man. Since on the cross the human nature of the Son of God perished, Fudge says that the Son of God perished. Thus Fudge argues from the cross,

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 230. [Italics original.]

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁷⁴⁷ Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 231, quoting White, *op. cit.*, pp.243-244.

where the human nature of Christ was extinguished, to the nature of hell as ending in extinction. Further, Fudge quotes approvingly two scholars whom he believes share this conclusion. He quotes two statements by James Dunn. "Man could not be helped other than through his [Christ's] annihilation," and "This process of destruction is speeded up in the case of Jesus, the representative man, the *hilasterion*, and destroys him."⁷⁴⁸ However, in context the focus is on the annihilation of the body of Jesus, and I think that Fudge is going considerably further than this. Fudge also quotes Oscar Cullmann favourably, who wrote that:

[Jesus] can conquer death only by actually dying, by betaking Himself to the sphere of death, the destroyer of life, to the sphere of nothingness... Whoever wants to conquer death must die; he must really cease to live - not simply live on as an immortal soul; but die in body and soul, lose life itself... furthermore, if life is to issue out of so genuine a death as this, a new divine act of creation is necessary. And this act of creation calls back to life not just a part of man, but the whole man - all that God had created and death had annihilated.⁷⁴⁹

Not only does this confirm that Fudge believes that Christ's body and human soul were annihilated, but also that this requires a subsequent re-creation. I will return to this later point in my discussion of the resurrection below. Fudge himself raises, and seeks to answer, an objection to this and in doing so serves to underline his conclusion above that Christ's human nature, but only his human nature, was extinguished:

Some may object that the original curse entailed death forever, dissolution with no hope of resurrection, and that this did not befall Jesus. Conditionalist author, Edward White, admitted that this would be a problem - if Jesus had been only human - but he saw in Jesus' divinity the impossibility of such *permanent* destruction.⁷⁵⁰

Fudge then quotes White to explain how permanent destruction was avoided:

If Jesus had been the Son of David only... He must have suffered everlasting destruction... But the Saviour was Divine... And therefore, when the curse had taken effect upon the manhood, it was still open to the Divine Inhabitant, absorbing the Spirit into his own essence, to restore the 'destroyed Temple' from its ruins; and, taking possession of it, in virtue of His Divinity (not, legally, as a man), 'to raise it up on the third day.'⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁸ Fudge., *op. cit.*, p. 229, quoting J.D.G. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus," in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology*, presented to L.L. Morris on his 60th birthday. Ed. Robert Banks. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1974), p. 130. The first of these quotes is itself a quotation. The footnote in Dunn reads, "K. Barth, cited by G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace: The Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 135." The second quotation is actually from p. 139 in Dunn.

⁷⁴⁹ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London: Epworth, 1958), pp. 25-26; quoted by Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 231. Quoting White, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-244.

Therefore Fudge holds that Jesus experienced hell on the cross, and this hell was the annihilationists' hell of torment and ultimate extinction.

Froom also draws the same conclusion, that Christ's human nature was annihilated. Froom opens a section headed "Christ Truly "Died" According to Prediction, Fulfilment, Attestation," with this statement:

It is essential to establish the fact that Christ *died* on Calvary - truly *died*. And no inner or real self, or being, *as a separate, continuing entity*, lived on during the period between His giving up of the "ghost," or "expiring," and His resurrection on the "third day."⁷⁵²

This point is expressed so forcefully, it seems to imply that even Christ's divine nature ceased to exist for a period. Froom doesn't elucidate this point, but I assume that this is not intended. The basic point is reiterated, with the middle term of a penal substitutionary atonement also spelt out, in a later quote:

If Christ did not Himself *truly, actually die*, as called for in the terms of atoning substitution - but only his body, while His spirit lived on as a continuing discarnate entity... - then the declared transaction of the cross is a travesty; and the veracity of God and of Christ is impugned.⁷⁵³

Atkinson writes along similar lines: "the facts of the suffering and death of Christ Jesus prove conclusively that the punishment of sin is death in its natural sense of the deprivation of life."⁷⁵⁴ In fact Atkinson's position is more complex than this, since he also holds, as do all Annihilationists, that just as Christ suffered a period of torment before death, so the damned suffer torment before extinction too. Thus Atkinson can write

Now at the time of his passion the Lord Jesus underwent a period of increasingly excruciating agony culminating in death. The suffering lasted some hours. There is no reason why we should not take this as the model and example of the final punishment of sin.⁷⁵⁵

This position is premised on Atkinson's anthropological monism, and the belief therefore that when Christ died bodily there was no immaterial part which continued to exist. Discussing 1. Corinthians 15 he writes, "We may also notice that the whole of the apostle's teaching in this chapter is based upon the resurrection of Christ and not a word said about,

⁷⁵² Froom, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 377. [Italics original]

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 381-2. [Italics original]

⁷⁵⁴ Atkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

much less based upon, the survival of Christ between death and resurrection.”⁷⁵⁶ Peterson rightly concludes that Atkinson holds that Christ’s human nature was extinguished:

Atkinson... holds that nothing of Jesus’ humanity survived death until his resurrection. His human nature experienced death, that is, the deprivation of life. In other words, Jesus’ humanity suffered extinction in death. I will give him the benefit of the doubt and conclude that he held that Jesus’ deity did not suffer extinction.⁷⁵⁷

While I agree with the thrust of this paragraph, there are two small clarifications I would make. First, I’m not sure that Atkinson would argue there was ‘nothing’ of Jesus’ humanity left, if this means that even his body was extinguished, even if this might be the logical implication of his position. Second, as I argued in Chapter 2, I’m not sure to what degree someone can ‘experience’ death, since it is itself the cessation of experience. However, the main point stands, that Atkinson is another annihilationist who argues that the equivalence with the atonement leads to the conclusion that Christ’s human nature was extinguished. An indication of just how tightly some annihilationists see the link between the experience of Christ and that of the damned is seen in Atkinson’s comment on the length of the torment of the damned, part of which I have quoted above. From the example of Christ he draws a conclusion about the length of suffering in hell.

The suffering [of the Lord Jesus] lasted some hours. There is no reason why we should not take this as the model and example of the final punishment of sin. We are not likely to go far wrong if we conclude that His suffering was the most extreme that will be inflicted on the most deviant and responsible sinner...⁷⁵⁸

There is another aspect of this question which I will not examine here, since it is closely linked to the question of the immortality of the soul, which I have decided to exclude from my discussion. To briefly outline the issue: many Annihilationists, particularly in the nineteenth century, argued that the annihilationist position made the atonement a greater work because it gained the gift of immortal life and not merely changed the quality of an already owned immortality. Such an argument is developed, for example, by Constable:

According to the Augustinian theory, Christ came to alter the condition of life from being miserable to being happy: according to our theory, Christ came to bestow life itself. This latter is the greater work... And the view which attributes to

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3. [Italics original]

⁷⁵⁷ Peterson, R.A., “Basil Atkinson: A Key Figure for Twentieth-Century Evangelical Annihilationism” in *Churchman*, p. 204.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103. There are a variety of opinions as to how long the period of torment might last, and some annihilationists argue that it is considerably longer than Atkinson suggests. [See ACUTE, *op. cit.*, p.19.] One perverse consequence of an argument that extinction is a ‘natural’ consequence of the torment, is that the more intense the torment, the shorter time it would last.

the atonement the gift of eternal life magnifies that atonement more, infinitely more, than the view which only attributes to the atonement the alteration of the condition and circumstances of life.⁷⁵⁹

Dixon is probably unique in modern evangelical writing in making this kind of point from the atonement, but he argues from it for Traditionalism: "Christ did not die for our potential non-existence, but for our eternal bearing of the wrath of God in a place separated from Him."⁷⁶⁰ I think that Dixon's argument fails because annihilationists are arguing that the potential non-existence is the consequence of the wrath of God and an infinite punishment, and thus the two are not relevantly distinct.

In conclusion there is a well established link between the atonement and hell, which has been picked up by a number of Annihilationists and it is used both to argue for Annihilationism and against Traditionalism.

4.2.2 An Assessment of the Annihilationist Arguments

The whole notion of Christ on the cross suffering the punishment to be experienced in hell by the damned may well be rejected by those not wed to an atonement doctrine of penal substitution. However, this is a doctrine shared by almost all evangelical writers on both sides in the recent literature, and the task I have set myself is not to adjudicate upon the validity of this shared premise, but to assess the coherence of the arguments based upon it. However, in the second section of this chapter I will begin with assessment and then I will examine in more detail exactly what doctrine of the atonement these arguments require if they are to be securely grounded.

Recent traditionalist discussions of this link and its implications for the doctrine of hell are even rarer and briefer than those of annihilationists: four pages in Peterson,⁷⁶¹ a mere two pages in Morey;⁷⁶² four brief pages in Gerstner;⁷⁶³ as well as some shorter comments by a few other writers. However, I hope to demonstrate that it is a fruitful line of study. As

⁷⁵⁹ Constable, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-6.

⁷⁶⁰ Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-5. Constable's position favours the view that extinction is more severe a punishment than torment. Dixon's argument is more in line with the twentieth century debate in assuming that torment is more severe.

⁷⁶¹ Peterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-216.

⁷⁶² Morey, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-103.

⁷⁶³ Gerstner, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-162.

above, I will examine the implications of the link in both directions: both of the atonement for the doctrine of hell, and of the doctrine of hell for the atonement. I want to argue that an annihilationist doctrine of hell results in an unorthodox doctrine of the incarnation and the resurrection.

4.2.2.1 The Implications of the Atonement for the Doctrine of Hell

I begin with the doctrine of the atonement and its implications for the doctrine of hell. Here I turn first to the question of what happened at the death of Christ. I begin with the arguments of several traditionalists that since Christ was not extinguished on the cross it follows that the damned will not be extinguished in hell. Donald Macleod states,

But there is a deeper, more fundamental question. The wages of sin is death. Suppose we translate that, *the wages of sin is annihilation*. How can we relate this to the atonement? Christ became a curse for us. Does that mean that he was annihilated? Christ tasted death. Does that mean that he tasted annihilation? To ask is to answer. For Jesus, the curse was conscious torment: something through which he existed, and throughout which he was fully conscious.⁷⁶⁴

In response an annihilationist might point out that Macleod has overlooked the fact that for annihilationists the wages of sin are extinction (which Macleod calls 'annihilation') preceded by torment. An annihilationist might respond that Jesus suffered pain and then suffered extinction which is like the two-part hell of Annihilationism. However this still leaves the question of whether Christ was extinguished, and whether that is an acceptable doctrine. However his general point still stands. Blanchard argues that "[I]f 'the second death' is the ultimate punishment for sin, making it mean annihilation collapses before the fact that when Jesus bore the full penalty for sin in his death on the cross he was not annihilated."⁷⁶⁵ Morey's writes: "There is no way to escape the fact that Christ did not experience total annihilation in body and soul on the cross."⁷⁶⁶

However, none of the traditionalist writers quoted above offers justification for their statements that Christ's human nature was not extinguished, presumably believing it to be self-evident. There are however several other reasons I will propose to justify rejection of the annihilationist understanding of the atonement as involving extinction. There are two related sets of problems which follow from the position that Christ's human nature was

⁷⁶⁴ Macleod, *art. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷⁶⁵ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

extinguished: this understanding of the atonement results in unorthodox doctrines of the incarnation and of the resurrection. I will examine these problems in the following two sections, along with some related issues.

So, first, the implications for the incarnation. The argument here is that the notion of the extinction of the human nature of Christ is untenable within a Chalcedonian Christology. If an annihilationist argues that Christ's human nature was extinguished at death, it therefore follows that the incarnation ceased at that point. This, it can be argued, contradicts Chalcedonian Christology. John Cooper summarises the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon of 451 at this point, and then points out the implication of holding that Christ's human nature was annihilated on the cross.

Since the Council of Chalcedon the church has officially recognised what is taught in the New Testament and held by the early church; that because of the incarnation Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human; that he is one person with two natures, one divine and one human; and that these natures are neither mixed together nor are they separable.⁷⁶⁷

Now if the extinction - re-creation account of Jesus' resurrection is true, then the teaching of Chalcedon is false. The two natures of Christ are separable and were in fact separated between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The human being Jesus completely ceased to exist... So the divine-human person Jesus Christ did not exist for the interim. Only the nonincarnate Word, the wholly divine Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, existed during that time. What occurred on Easter is essentially the same as the miracle of Christmas. Once again the Word became flesh, this time resurrection flesh. We do not have an incarnation and something essentially different - a resurrection - in the life of Christ, but two incarnations. If the extinction - re-creationists are consistent, they seem closer to the heresies which Chalcedon rejected than to orthodox Christology itself. For either the human nature of the Son is incidental even after his incarnation and was non-existent for three Jewish days; or else we have two persons in Jesus Christ, a divine person who continued to exist and a human person who did not. Neither option would have escaped condemnation at Chalcedon... Since human nature is such that persons can exist temporarily without their bodies, Jesus Christ could have existed between Friday and Sunday without his body and yet have been one person with both a divine and a human nature.⁷⁶⁸

The final sentence of this quotation highlights what Cooper understands as the orthodox understanding of the death of Christ: that his human body and his human soul were

⁷⁶⁶ Morey, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1937; reprint, Baker, 1975), p.107.

⁷⁶⁸ John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting. Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 144-5.

separated, and that this does not constitute a cessation of the incarnation. An example of this orthodox understanding is found, for instance, in Berkhof:

In a short period of time He bore the infinite wrath against sin to the very end and came out victoriously. This was possible for Him only because of His exalted nature. At this point we should guard against misunderstanding, however. Eternal death in the case of Christ did not consist in an abrogation of the union of the Logos with the human nature... The Logos remained united with the human nature even when the body was in the grave;...⁷⁶⁹

Cooper later adds a further comment which offers slightly more detail about the nature of the separation of the natures that must be held took place: "For if Jesus was extinct between Good Friday and Easter, then some doctrinally illicit separation took place, either of the divine and human natures, or perhaps even of two hypostasized persons, one divine and one human."⁷⁷⁰ Peterson, in the context of a discussion of the position of Fudge, draws the same conclusion as Cooper: "Indeed, to hold that Jesus' humanity was annihilated on the cross, brings one into conflict with Chalcedonian Christology."⁷⁷¹ Therefore, if Annihilationists want to maintain both their doctrine of hell and their argument for a link between hell and the cross, then their options are limited with respect to their Christology. I will note two options, to reinterpret or to reject Chalcedon's teaching at this point, and argue that neither are likely to be accepted by Annihilationists, and thus they must either change their doctrine of hell, their doctrine of the atonement, or their understanding of a link between the two.

The first option, to reinterpret, is to argue that Chalcedon doesn't actually require the permanent unity of the natures after the incarnation. One suggestion is that what I have called 'Chalcedonian Christology' is actually the product of later Councils than Chalcedon. Swinburne writes that "Some lesser creeds and church pronouncements have stated that the union of God the Son with human nature (soul and body) was, after the conception of Christ, permanent; that Christ took away with him at the end of his earthly life his human nature and body."⁷⁷² It is certainly true that the first council to explicitly state the permanence of the union was not Chalcedon, but the 11th Council of Toledo (675 A.D.), in The Symbol of Faith, which stated that "... the one person of Christ has so united in

⁷⁶⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1941), p. 339.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁷⁷¹ Peterson, R.A., "The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism: The Theological Method of Edward Fudge," *Presbyterion* 21.1 (1995), p. 27.

⁷⁷² Swinburne, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

himself that the divinity can never be separated from the humanity..." However, this was understood to be in agreement with Chalcedon, and this permanent union of the natures was understood by the tradition in the Western church to be the implication of the Chalcedonian doctrine of the incarnation.

The second option, to reject, would be to deny the doctrine of permanent union. Swinburne opens the way to this option when states that "I cannot see the permanent union as a central Christian doctrine."⁷⁷³ By this he seems to indicate not just that it is less important than some other doctrines but that it can be dropped without affecting other, more central, doctrines such as the incarnation. However, this is a step which would require extensive justification, and would seem to be too radical for many evangelicals.

If neither of these options are acceptable to evangelicals, then this leaves Annihilationists two alternatives: they can either change their doctrine of hell, or offer a different account of the kind of link there is between the doctrines of hell and the atonement. Peterson concludes his discussion with a call to Annihilationists to take the first of these options, since he believes that the second is not possible for them:

I conclude: instead of Fudge's appeal to systematic theology strengthening his case for conditionalism, it weakens it considerably. Indeed, to hold that Jesus' humanity was annihilated on the cross brings one into conflict with Chalcedonian Christology. Such a prospect ought to cause conditionalists to re-examine their views, for the Bible teaches that Christ did suffer the pains of hell, but not as they are conceived by Annihilationists.⁷⁷⁴

I believe that Peterson's assessment is correct at this point, and his conclusion for annihilationists is well founded. However, I will examine the second alternative of a weakened link further below, but before then I will offer further arguments for questioning the annihilationist position on the basis of its doctrinal implications.

There are also implications of Annihilationism for the doctrine of the resurrection if it is argued that the human nature of Christ was annihilated. I will argue that some of these implications are unorthodox, and therefore very likely to be unacceptable to Annihilationists. At this point I need to highlight a distinction to the discussion, mentioned by Morey above: the orthodox position is that Christ had both a human body and a human

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁷⁷⁴ Peterson, *Hermeneutics*, p. 27.

soul, as essential to his human nature. Therefore, if the annihilationist argues from the equivalence of the cross to hell that Christ's human nature must have been extinguished, then the annihilationist has to argue that both Christ's human body and soul would have to be extinguished. This is certainly the conclusion that Morey believes such a position must draw: "If the Annihilationists were right, then Christ should have disintegrated on the cross and would have ceased to exist in body and soul."⁷⁷⁵

First, after extinction recreation is required rather than resurrection. Resurrection is impossible since there is nothing left to resurrect. Fudge's own comments on the creation and curse above point to this: God created out of non-being; the result of sin is death, understood as return to non-being; therefore if Christ died then a new creation is required. The language of resurrection refers to something that already exists. Gerstner states this objection succinctly, "... God can't raise what is not there to raise."⁷⁷⁶ Cooper, in a quote above, spoke of 'the extinction - re-creation account of Jesus' resurrection'. Therefore if Christ was extinguished, he cannot have been resurrected. Since the New Testament witnesses to the resurrection of Christ's body, confirmed by the empty tomb, he cannot have been extinguished.

Second, this new creation would also be a new incarnation, since Christ would now be taking to himself newly created flesh. Cooper makes this point above as well. Peterson also makes this point, although confusingly he talks about 'resurrected flesh' rather than 're-created flesh' following extinction:

Furthermore if Jesus were annihilated on Calvary, and his natures separated because his humanity ceased to exist, then his resurrection constituted another incarnation. This incarnation would differ from the first in that this time the Word would take to himself resurrected flesh. Notwithstanding, it would be a second incarnation.⁷⁷⁷

Third, if Jesus suffers extinction then one might expect the body of Jesus to cease to exist at the moment of his death, and not simply cease to be animated. From this it would follow that there would have been nothing left on the cross after death, and obviously no body to be buried. Morey notes that this is the conclusion the Jehovah's Witnesses draw.

⁷⁷⁵ Morey, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁷⁷⁶ Gerstner, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁷⁷⁷ Peterson, *Hermeneutics*, p. 27.

With identical logic to Annihilationists, he states that the Jehovah's Witnesses argue that, "In order for Christ's punishment to parallel the total destruction of body and soul which will happen to sinners, they feel that Christ must be totally destroyed in body and soul."⁷⁷⁸ From this premise it follows that, "The Jehovah's Witnesses state that Christ's body probably dissolved into gases and ceased to exist... Thus [the Jehovah's Witnesses] go on to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. They state that Jesus was raised as a spirit creature."⁷⁷⁹ Thus, Morey concludes, "If [Annihilationists] are consistent, they will have to end up denying the bodily resurrection of Christ as do the Jehovah's Witnesses."⁷⁸⁰ An annihilationist could respond that although Christ's body was extinguished, it doesn't mean that it had to cease to exist immediately, but that it could simply have rotted gradually in the tomb, had it not been resurrected (or, as I have argued, re-created). However since the extinction is penal it would seem to me marginally more likely that it would be immediate. While I don't think that this is a particularly strong argument, Annihilationists do face the problem of explaining the way in which the body was extinguished and why it did not immediately cease to exist.

Fourth, there is a further difficulty with respect to the soul: even if something extinguished *can* be said to be resurrected, there is no doctrine in the New Testament of the resurrection of the *soul* of Christ. Gerstner makes this point in a comment on John 2:19.

If the soul had perished with the death of the Body, as [P.E.] Hughes assumes, it would have perished permanently because the soul, according to the Annihilationists, has no independent existence apart from the body... Our text refers to the resurrection of Christ's body, not His soul, which according to Hughes, must be gone forever since no re-creation of the soul is mentioned in the text.⁷⁸¹

I think that this argument holds even if the soul could potentially have independent existence from the body, because in the case of Christ Annihilationists are committed to the notion that his body and soul were extinguished. However, mortalists have always argued that the soul as well as the body of all people would be resurrected. Therefore, while annihilationists need to account for the re-creation of Christ's soul, there is at least one, albeit minority, position which might be acceptable to evangelicals. Fudge notes a

⁷⁷⁸ Morey, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁷⁸¹ Gerstner, *op. cit.*, p. 44. Gerstner is inaccurate to state that all annihilationists reject the possibility of the independent existence of the soul. As I demonstrated in chapter one, while this may be the majority position it is not the uniform one.

similar argument in Calvin: "Even John Calvin objected in his *Psychopannychia* that it was unthinkable that Jesus' "soul" truly died or even slept."⁷⁸² Calvin argues that the divine person of Jesus could not die in the sense that his opponents used the term. Rather "... death was a separation of soul and body. But the soul never lost its life."⁷⁸³ However I have excluded from this thesis discussion the issue of the Immortality of the Soul.

Fifth, there is the problem of explaining the continuity of identity of the human nature of Christ through death if it is extinguished. Cooper raises this issue with reference to 'monists'. Not all annihilationists are monists, but the point still stands for their understanding of Christ's death, because they equate the death of Christ not with the first death but the second death, at which both body and soul are extinguished even more completely than a monist holds occurs at the first death. Cooper writes, "all monists... have the problem of personal identity... a distinct entity is created [after death]... So [they] must explain how this new personal being is numerically identical with the earthly personal being."⁷⁸⁴ Anderson makes this point when he writes, "So we say if *the Man* Christ Jesus did not rise from the dead a wholly *new* being was called to life at the resurrection."⁷⁸⁵ An obvious, and strong, response is that the continuity of the person is guaranteed by God. However, since most of the discussion of this issue in the recent debate has turned on the doctrine of 'soul sleep', and the related issue of the mortality of the soul, discussion would take me into the issue of the immortality of the soul, which I have decided to exclude.

Thus far I have argued on the basis of the implications *if* Christ's human nature was extinguished. I now want to suggest that there may be a problem with the notion of Christ suffering extinction. The problem arises because Christ the divine person remains conscious, and it is difficult to see how he could suffer the cessation of consciousness that extinction involves. Certainly there would be the human nature's dreaded anticipation of extinction, but the moment of extinction could not be experienced by the divine person as a human person would precisely because consciousness would remain. The traditionalist, by contrast, can argue that Christ could experience both torment and death understood as

⁷⁸² Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁷⁸³ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, vol. 3, p. 437. Quoted by Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

⁷⁸⁴ Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁷⁸⁵ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 95, footnote. [Italics original.]

the separation of the body and the soul. On the understanding of penal substitution that underlies this debate, it would therefore be difficult to see how Christ could be a substitute in the sense required.

In conclusion, on the premise of the link between the atonement and hell that is held in this debate, I have shown that there are significant difficulties for the annihilationist position. I believe that these difficulties are great enough to conclude that Annihilationism is an unacceptable position for an Evangelical. This doctrine of hell, I have argued, raises problems related to the doctrines of the incarnation with a separation of the natures of Christ greater than that usually accepted in the tradition on the basis of a Chalcedonian Christology; and the resurrection, since recreation rather than resurrection is required after extinction; and, more tentatively, the substitutionary nature of Christ's death, because of its disanalogy to the experience of the annihilationist hell.

4.2.2.2 The Implications of Hell for the Doctrine of the Atonement

I now turn to make a brief point in following the argument in the opposite direction, from the annihilationist doctrine of hell to its implications for the atonement. As I have already noted, annihilationists hold that there are two elements to the punishment of hell: a period of torment and then extinction. On the premise of the link between the atonement and hell assumed in the debate, it would seem likely that an annihilationist has to hold that the twin elements of the punishment to be inflicted in hell, torment and extinction, correspond to two elements in Christ's passion. The most likely division in Christ's passion is that between a period of torment on the cross, and his death, probably continuing until the resurrection. Thus Christ's sufferings on the cross correspond to the period of torment; his death to the extinction of the second death. No annihilationist spells out the link in this form, but it seems the most likely position. It remains a task for annihilationists to justify some such division in the atonement corresponding to their division in the punishment of the damned.

In conclusion, I have argued that Annihilationism faces major difficulties if it wants to maintain and argue from a strict substitutionary parallel between the atonement and hell. These difficulties arise particularly when the implications of the doctrine of the atonement

are examined for the doctrine of hell. I have argued that these implications include reinterpretations of central Christian doctrines including the resurrection, the incarnation, and substitutionary atonement itself. Thus, if the equivalence is maintained and the type of reasoning I have noted in the debate is held to be legitimate, then I would conclude that Annihilationism faces doctrinal consequences which would warrant the rejection of Annihilationism by evangelicals.

A strategy for annihilationists to avoid this conclusion would be to give a different account of the link between hell and the cross. I therefore now turn to examine the nature of the link between hell and the cross in the tradition to see what support there might be for this strategy.

4.3 The Nature of the Link between Hell and the Atonement

An alternative strategy for annihilationists to avoid the unorthodox conclusions I have noted above would be to give a different account of the link between hell and the cross so as to argue that the suffering of Christ on the cross is not equivalent to that of the damned in hell. This is not a strategy any annihilationist actually adopts, and it would obviously also undermine those annihilationist arguments for Annihilationism and against Traditionalism based on that link. However, it is a logically possible strategy to avoid the undesirable doctrinal consequences I have outlined.

In this section I will argue that equivalence is usually held to follow from the doctrine of penal substitution, and therefore if annihilationists reject equivalence they are probably committed to rejecting the mainstream evangelical doctrine of the atonement too. I will conclude that since the rejection of penal substitution is unacceptable to most evangelicals, annihilationists cannot avoid the unorthodox doctrinal implications of equivalence. I will begin with a brief taxonomy of the history of tradition of the doctrine of the atonement, based on the categories of James Denney. This taxonomy will serve to set the discussion in context, but specifically to establish what doctrine of the atonement establishes the strongest link with the doctrine of hell. I will also establish that this doctrine of penal substitution is held by most evangelicals. I will then examine leading theologians in the tradition who hold this doctrine to see what conclusions they draw

about equivalence with the experience of the damned. This equivalence in the tradition has not been studied beyond the debate over hell where the discussion is very brief. Therefore I will quote several authors at length. From a study of Calvin, Edwards and Owen and, more briefly, Luther and Packer, I will conclude that the doctrine of penal substitution is held to establish that degree of equivalence which leads annihilationists to hold unorthodox doctrines of the incarnation and resurrection. I will also note that the link is stronger where a doctrine of limited atonement is held, but that equivalence is still established without holding to this specific form of penal substitution. Annihilationists are therefore unable to avoid equivalence without either rejecting the doctrine of penal substitution, or rejecting the conclusions of leading theologians in the evangelical tradition. I will argue that both of these conclusions would be considered undesirable by most evangelicals.

4.3.1 The Link Between Hell and the Atonement in the Tradition

In this survey of the doctrinal tradition for understanding the atonement, my aim is to focus on those arguments that bear on the question of what Christ suffered on the cross, and whether he could be said to have suffered hell. I will begin by noting that the most significant distinction in the tradition for my purposes is that of what kind of satisfaction Christ made. I will conclude that the strongest equivalence between cross and hell is established when it is held that Christ made satisfaction by being punished. Later, when examining the writings of Owen and Edwards, I will note the additional distinction of those for whom Christ died, and suggest that limited atonement gives the strongest link. Having defined the different usages of satisfaction, I will offer a summary of several leading theologians in the Protestant tradition of which most evangelicals are theological heirs.

In his survey of *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Denney contrasts two broad streams of understanding of the atonement based on their understanding of how satisfaction is made for sin. The first stream holds that 'Satisfaction is punishment'. On this, Denney comments, "Satisfaction, in the strictly legal sense of the term, is identical with punishment. The man who has broken a law makes satisfaction by enduring the

penalty which is attached by the law to his offence."⁷⁸⁶ Denney goes on to point out the implications for the link with hell: "Some [theologians] rendered it rigorously in the legal sense, and then to make satisfaction was the same thing as to pay the penalty, which in this case was eternal death."⁷⁸⁷ The second stream he calls 'Satisfaction or punishment', in which satisfaction is an alternative to punishment. Denney explains the second stream as follows:

Others, in accordance with the facts involved in the sinner's satisfaction for his own sin, could only regard the satisfaction of Christ as improperly or quasi penal... There had to be pain or sacrifice in it as in all satisfactions made by men, but it was not precisely penal pain. It was pain by which the penal pain due to sin was avoided. It was pain which in a way was a substitute for punishment:....⁷⁸⁸

This understanding of the term was introduced into theology by Tertullian. McDonald notes this position, and draws the conclusion for the link between cross and hell.

Other [theologians] took satisfaction in the sense Tertullian had applied it to the Christian's repentance, and so regarded Christ's death not as an equivalent, but as something accepted in lieu of the full quota of punishment. Christ did not, nor could not, suffer the total punishment for human sin; but he did suffer its pain. The pain was "accepted" as "satisfaction"; it was the substitute for punishment.⁷⁸⁹

These two broad streams can also be seen as characterising historical periods. Packer suggests that the Reformation marks a watershed in the understanding of satisfaction:

What the Reformers did was to redefine satisfactio (satisfaction), the main mediaeval category for thought about the cross. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?*, which largely determined the mediaeval development, saw Christ's satisfactio for our sins as the offering of compensation for damages done, but the reformers saw it as the undergoing of vicarious punishment (*poena*) to meet the claims on us of God's holy Law and wrath (i.e. his punitive justice).⁷⁹⁰

Denney notes that most Protestant theology came to stand in this broad stream where punishment is satisfaction.

In Protestant theology the equivocal character of the idea of satisfaction... tends to disappear. The satisfaction of which the theologians think is not the Anselmic one, which has no relation to punishment, nor that of the penitential system, which was only quasi-penal, but that of Roman law, which is identical with punishment. What comes more and more steadily into view is the idea that Christ made satisfaction for our sins, by bearing the penalty of them in our

⁷⁸⁶ James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), pp. 46-7.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁸⁹ H.D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ: In Faith, Revelation, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 155.

⁷⁹⁰ Packer, *Cross*, p. 4.

stead... Melanchthon is as explicit as words can be: 'Deus justitiae suae puniendo satisfacit; justitia servatur in recipienda poena.'⁷⁹¹

Again, Denney recognises this as the mainstream Protestant position when he writes, "The orthodox doctrine made Christ's satisfaction penal; Christ made satisfaction by bearing the punishment of sin."⁷⁹² Packer's summary is that penal substitution was held by all the magisterial reformers. "The two main historical points relating to the idea [of penal substitution] are, first, that Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melanchthon and their reforming contemporaries were the pioneers in stating it..."⁷⁹³ It is this stream which characterises evangelicalism. The importance of penal substitution is highlighted by Packer in a lecture in 1973, when, as I have noted already, he speaks of

a belief which, by and large, is a distinguishing mark of the world-wide evangelical fraternity: namely, the belief that Christ's death on the cross had the character of penal substitution, and that it was in virtue of this fact that it brought salvation to mankind.⁷⁹⁴

However the distinction between the two streams is not watertight. Denney argues that on the 'satisfaction or punishment' position, satisfaction can still be very similar to the punishment.

In law, satisfaction was penal; it was rendered to the law by paying its penalty. In the discipline of the Church it was not strictly speaking penal; it was a means of averting the penalty. But it was painful, it was due to sin, and in that sense it was quasi-penal.⁷⁹⁵

The broad distinction between the streams remains useful, though. And before turning to a more detailed study of the 'satisfaction is punishment' stream, I would note two provisional conclusions. First, Annihilationists face their major challenge from the stream which most strongly establishes equivalence, that is the 'satisfaction is punishment' stream. Second, since this stream is characteristic of the Reformers, Protestant orthodoxy in general, and evangelicalism in particular, annihilationists may find themselves having to reject the mainstream evangelical heritage on the atonement.

In turning to examine more closely the 'satisfaction is punishment' stream, my aim will be to examine the conclusions that representative writers draw about the link between

⁷⁹¹ Denney, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷⁹³ Packer, *Cross*, p. 3.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3, [Italics original.] The second point is that Socinus' arguments have been central in the discussion ever since.

⁷⁹⁵ Denney, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

the cross and hell. I will focus on writers who are particularly influential for evangelical theology, since annihilationists would be rightly hesitant to reject their conclusions if they want to remain acceptable to the evangelical constituency. Having spoken of a broad stream in which 'satisfaction is punishment' Denney distinguishes two lines that flowed from the assumption, which he entitles the 'legal/material' and the 'spiritual'. It is in the first of these two sub-categories that the theological tradition is found which most clearly claims that Christ suffered hell on the cross; however the second may provide some additional suggestive links to the modified Traditionalism I have proposed. I turn now to specific theologians noted as standing in these lines, beginning with the legal/material line. Denney writes:

Many theologians in applying it [satisfaction] to Christ took it in the strict legal sense. He made satisfaction for sin by enduring the penalty which was due for it to man. But this penalty was eternal death, or the pains of hell. Could any one say that Christ has endured this?⁷⁹⁶

Denney answers "Yes" and goes on to note that Luther, Calvin and Owen draw just this conclusion. I now turn to an examination of the views of Calvin and Owen, along with those of Edwards and, more briefly, Packer. I begin, though, with some references to Luther's views in the secondary literature.

That Luther held a doctrine of penal substitution is argued by Packer, who in turn quotes favourably Pannenberg's statement that "Luther was probably the first since Paul and his school to have seen with full clarity that Jesus' death in its genuine sense is to be understood as vicarious penal suffering."⁷⁹⁷ Luther writes clearly of a very strong link between the sufferings of Christ and the damned: "'In His innocent, tender heart He was obliged to taste for us eternal death and damnation, and, in short, to suffer everything that a condemned sinner has merited and must suffer for ever.' And again: 'Sinsit poenam infernalem.'"⁷⁹⁸ Dale summarises Luther's commentary on Galatians 3:13:

the substance of this passage is this - Christ so assumed the penal responsibilities of mankind, that all who believe in him are delivered from the penalties of sin. The law has inflicted on Him the sufferings which but for His mercy would have been inflicted on us.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷⁹⁷ W. Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, tr. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe, SCM, London, 1968, p. 279, quoted by Packer, Cross, p. 32, n. 33.

⁷⁹⁸ Denney, *op. cit.*, p. 49, footnote 1. In this footnote Denney notes that there are many other similar references in Luther: "See the abundant collection of passages in Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie*, ii. 411f."

⁷⁹⁹ Dale, *op. cit.*, pp. 289-290.

Packer adds a further quote from Luther to similar effect:

‘Christ himself suffered the dread and horror of a distressed conscience that tasted eternal wrath;’ ‘it was not a game, or a joke, or play-acting when he said “Thou hast forsaken me”; for then he felt himself really forsaken in all things even as a sinner is forsaken” (*Werke*, 5.602,605)⁸⁰⁰

Finally Peterson quotes Luther to highlight that Christ’s experience of hell’s torment was not just physical: “Christ, therefore, suffered the pains of hell for us, in physical death and ‘also in the anxiety and terror of a frightened conscience, which feels God’s eternal wrath as though it would be forsaken and rejected by God for eternity.”⁸⁰¹

Like Luther, Calvin was an advocate of a doctrine of penal substitution in which punishment is the means by which satisfaction is made. I offer three quotations:

Christ... took upon himself and suffered the punishment that, from God’s righteous judgement, threatened all sinners... that by this expiation he made satisfaction and sacrifice duly to God the Father...”⁸⁰² Again, “in every respect [he] took our place to pay the price of our redemption.”⁸⁰³ Further, “For unless Christ had made satisfaction for our sins, it would not have been said that he appeased God by taking upon himself the penalty to which we were subject.”⁸⁰⁴

Denney judges that, compared to Luther, Calvin “is almost equally emphatic” on the equivalence of the punishment of Christ and that of the damned.⁸⁰⁵

This link is clearest in his exposition of the doctrine of the Descent into Hell.

Christ was put in the place of evildoers as surety and pledge - submitting himself even as accused - to bear and suffer all the punishments that they ought to have sustained. All - with this one exception: “He could not be held by the pangs of death” [Acts 2:24] No wonder, then, if he is said to have descended into hell, for he suffered the death that God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked!... The point is that the Creed sets forth what Christ suffered in the sight of men, and then appositely speaks of that invisible and incomprehensible judgement which he underwent in the sight of God in order that we might know not only that Christ’s body was given as the price of our redemption, but that he paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man.⁸⁰⁶

Calvin even suggests that Christ’s experience on the cross included some sense of the unending nature of hell: “he must also grapple hand to hand with... the dread of

⁸⁰⁰ Packer, *Cross*, p. 41.

⁸⁰¹ Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 112, quoting Luther in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, p. 205.

⁸⁰² Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. McNeill, J.T., trans. Battles, Ford Lewis, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 21 (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1960), p. 504.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁸⁰⁵ Denney, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

everlasting death.”⁸⁰⁷ Therefore for Calvin the doctrine of Christ’s descent into hell is a statement about Christ’s experience of hell. This equivalence is also spelt out when discussing the credal statement ‘Dead and Buried’. “Here again is to be seen how he in every respect took our place to pay the price of our redemption.”⁸⁰⁸ Calvin also discusses which aspects of Christ’s human nature suffered on the cross, concluding that he suffered in both body and soul. Calvin argues, “If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual.”⁸⁰⁹ Again, “And surely, unless his soul shared in the punishment, he would have been the Redeemer of bodies alone.”⁸¹⁰

There are features, though, of Calvin’s presentation which may initially seem to weaken this equivalence between the cross and hell. One such feature is that Christ’s work of salvation involves more than his death on the cross. The issue here is that if Christ’s work of salvation involves more than his death on the cross, then the equivalence is not between the cross and hell, but his whole life and hell, which becomes a more complex comparison to analyse. In a section headed (in the Battles edition) “Christ has redeemed us through his obedience, which he practised throughout his life.”⁸¹¹ Calvin writes

Now someone asks, How has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God, and acquired righteousness to render God favourable and kindly towards us? To this we can in general reply that he has achieved this by the whole course of his obedience.⁸¹²

He summarises, “In short, from the time when he took on the form of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us.”⁸¹³ This obedience was even necessary in death, because only a voluntary sacrifice was useful for righteousness.⁸¹⁴

⁸⁰⁶ Calvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 515-6.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 515. This understanding of the Descent into Hell came to be enshrined in The Heidelberg Catechism which at Question 44 asks, ‘Why is there added: “He descended into hell”?’ The answer is, “That in my severest tribulations I may be assured that Christ my Lord has redeemed me from hellish anxieties and torment by the unspeakable anguish, pains, and terrors which he suffered in his soul both on the cross and before.” *The Heidelberg Catechism*, translated by A.O. Miller and M.E. Osterhaven (Philadelphia: United Church, 1962). Peterson quotes a different, and unacknowledged, translation of this question which makes the point of Christ’s experience of hell even more clearly. “But only Christ out Substitute endured the full weight of “the anguish and torment of hell” here on earth (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 44).” Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁸⁰⁸ Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 511.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

However, the importance of this obedience in salvation should not be over-estimated, since the great emphasis is upon Christ's death on the cross.

Yet to define the way of salvation more exactly, Scripture ascribes this as peculiar and proper to Christ's death.... For this reason the so-called "Apostles' Creed" passes at once in the best order from the birth of Christ to his death and resurrection, wherein the whole of perfect salvation consists.⁸¹⁵

Another feature of Calvin's position that might seem to weaken equivalence is the universal extent of Christ's death, being sufficient satisfaction for the sins of all people. The issue here is that if Christ's death was sufficient satisfaction for the sins of more than one person, it might seem that he must have experienced a quantitatively far greater amount of suffering than any individual in hell. In fact, on a commercial analogy, Christ must have paid for everyone in both heaven and hell. However the response in the tradition was that Christ's death was of such value not because he experienced some multiple of the torments of hell, but because the dignity of his Divine nature gave the sufferings of his human nature far greater value. There was what I will call a 'divine multiplier'. This response could have been used by Calvin as well. A further response in the tradition, which also maintains equivalence, is that Christ had a federal headship and died as a representative, and therefore only suffered the equivalent of one individual in hell. Calvin certainly argues for Christ's death being representative. Despite difficulties, the Protestant tradition has usually followed Calvin here, maintaining that Christ had both a representative and a substitutionary relationship with the righteous.

In conclusion, it is clear that Calvin was an advocate of penal substitution, and from this he held that there was an equivalence whereby Christ could be said to have experienced hell on the cross. This is particularly apparent in his exposition of the credal phrase "He descended into hell."

I now turn to argue that the equivalence between the atonement and hell is even stronger if one holds a more specific understanding of the penal nature of the atonement in the doctrine of limited atonement. McDonald suggests this conclusion when he comments that theologians can speak of Christ "bearing in a literal and actual form from the divine punishment of man's sin... its strongest statement, as by Jonathan Edwards and John

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 507-8.

Owen, who restrict the atonement to the elect.”⁸¹⁶ The logic here is that if Christ died to save some and not others, there may well be a clearly defined quantity of substitutionary suffering that Christ experienced, and therefore that the equivalence is more likely to be exact. McDonald mentions Edwards and Owen, and I will focus on them not only because they offer perhaps the strongest and lengthiest advocacy of limited atonement, but also because they are major theologians, who have been influential in the evangelical tradition. In turning to these two advocates of limited atonement, it would be wrong to draw a sharp distinction between them and Calvin at this point. There is some debate about Calvin’s views, but it is arguable that Calvin was a ‘Calvinist’ at this point,⁸¹⁷ and certainly Owen saw himself as standing in the tradition of Calvin. However, these two writers do articulate limited atonement with greater definition.

In turning to John Owen first, I will examine his major discussion of the atonement: *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ: A Treatise in which the whole controversy about Universal Redemption is fully discussed*.⁸¹⁸ John Owen is quite explicit that Christ on the cross experienced the punishment due to sinners in hell. For example,

Christ so took and bare our sins, and had them so laid upon him, as that he underwent the punishment due to them, and that in our stead... The consequence of the proposition is apparent... Secondly, That all the evils of punishment whatsoever are comprised in these is unquestionably evident.”⁸¹⁹ Again, “Christ underwent not only that wrath (taking it passively) which the elect were under, but that also which they should have undergone had not he borne it for them:...⁸²⁰

Owen actually uses the phrase ‘pains of hell’: “it seems strange to me that Christ should undergo the pains of hell in their stead who lay in the pains of hell before he underwent those pains, and shall continue in them to eternity...”⁸²¹

Owen also reiterates Denney’s careful distinction about the meaning of satisfaction, and again clearly establishes equivalence. Having noted that the term ‘satisfaction’ is not

⁸¹⁶ H.D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ: In Faith, Revelation, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 223.

⁸¹⁷ See Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982).

⁸¹⁸ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ: A Treatise in which the whole controversy about Universal Redemption is fully discussed* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959.)

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

used in Scripture, he offers a brief definition: "being a compensation made to God by Christ for our debts."⁸²² He also offers a fuller definition:

Satisfaction is a term borrowed from the law, applied properly to things, thence translated and accommodated unto persons; and it is a full compensation of the creditor from the debtor... Personal debts are injuries and faults; which when a man hath committed he is liable to punishment... unless satisfaction be made.⁸²³

Owen then makes an important distinction which serves to emphasise the equivalence of the experience of Christ on the cross and the damned in hell.

Now there may be a twofold satisfaction: - First, By a solution, or paying the very thing that is in obligation, either by the party himself that is bound, or by some other in his stead: as, if I owe a man twenty pounds, and my friend goeth and payeth it, my creditor is fully satisfied. Secondly, By a solution, or paying of so much, although in another kind, not the same that is in the obligation, which by the creditor's acceptance, stands in the lieu of it; upon which, also, freedom from the obligation followeth, not necessarily, but by virtue of an act of favour.⁸²⁴

Owen continues, a few pages later

Now, whereas I said that there is a twofold satisfaction, whereby the debtor is freed from the obligation that is upon him, - the one being the *solutio ejusdem*, payment of the same thing that was in obligation; the other, *solutio tantidem*, of that which is not the same, nor equivalent unto it, but only in the gracious acceptance of the creditor, - it is worth our inquiry which of these it was that our Saviour did perform.⁸²⁵

In rejecting Grotius' arguments against the former, Owen concludes:

the death of Christ made satisfaction in the very thing that was required in the obligation... All our debt was in the curse of the law, which he wholly underwent. Neither do we read of any relaxation of the punishment in the Scripture, but only a commutation of the person...⁸²⁶

In giving a reason why God demands a *solutio ejusdem*, Owen merely states that "in the business of satisfaction... God, as a creditor, doth exactly require that payment of the debt by way of punishment."⁸²⁷ In other words the satisfaction required is the punishment due. This is also maintained when he writes, "[T]o make satisfaction to God for our sins, it is required only that he undergo the punishment due to them; for that is the satisfaction required where sin is the debt."⁸²⁸ This equivalence is emphasised by Owen's use of commercial analogies for the punishment of sin as the payment of a debt, although he notes that in doing so this changes the strict meaning of punishment. Thus

⁸²² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Owen notes that “It is true of punishment, as punishment, there is no creditor properly; for, “*Delicta puniri publice interest.*” But this punishment being considered also as a price, as it is, 1 Cor. vi. 20, it must be paid to the hands of some creditor, as this was into the hands of God;..”⁸²⁹ More briefly, “by the payment of the debt of sin understand, by analogy, the undergoing of the punishment due to it.”⁸³⁰ More succinctly still “where sin is the debt, [the payment] is punishment...”⁸³¹ Therefore Owen contends that the satisfaction Christ made was not payment in kind but the thing itself. This link is clarified by the frequent use of commercial analogies of debt payment for both punishment and satisfaction: since they both pay off the same debt they are presumably the same value coinage.

However, as with Calvin, despite such clear statements of an equivalence between the cross and hell, there are a number of points in Owen’s book which might raise doubts about the degree of this equivalence. Most have already been rehearsed in the above section on Calvin, although I will address them again here since Owen often gives more detail in his arguments. I begin by noting that Owen goes beyond Calvin particularly in the care with which he seeks to distinguish the ways in which Christ’s experience on the cross was like that of the damned, but also the points in which it differed.

The punishment due to our sin and the chastisement of our peace was upon him; which that it was the pains of hell, in their nature and being, in their weight and pressure, though not in tendency and continuance (it being impossible that he should be detained by death), who can deny and not be injurious to the justice of God, which will inevitably inflict those pains to eternity upon sinners?⁸³²

Similarly, Owen then offers this conclusion about the “nature of the satisfaction”:

It was a full, valuable compensation, made to the justice of God, for all the sins of all those for whom he made satisfaction, by undergoing that same punishment which, by reason of the obligation that was upon them, they themselves were bound to undergo. When I say the same, I mean essentially the same in weight and pressure, though not in all accidents of duration and the like; for it was impossible that he should be detained by death.⁸³³

Owen’s comments raise the issue as to how many of the accidents of the two experiences can differ, especially duration, without the substance of the equivalence being weakened to the point at which it becomes more misleading than enlightening to

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁸³² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

say that Christ experienced hell on the cross. Owen recognises the issue, and argues that accidents such as duration can differ and the equivalence maintained. Further, there is some debate about how Owen is to be understood at this point. Packer argues,

To construe Owen's statement of equivalence between what threatened us and what Christ endured in 'quantitative' terms, as if some calculus of penal pain was being applied, would be a misunderstanding, though admittedly one which Owen's constant reliance on the model of payment invites, and against which he did not guard.⁸³⁴

Denney however quotes the last excerpt of Owen quoted above which he reads as arguing for such a quantitative equivalence.⁸³⁵ Denney therefore states that Owen holds a view different, and indeed objectionable, to his own. However, Packer argues that Denney's conclusion isn't warranted, by offering an alternative reading of Owen and concluding that Owen actually had the same view as Denney, in which there was equivalence, but not a quantitative equivalence. Thus Packer quotes Denney, "that in that dark hour He had to realise to the full the divine reaction against the sin in the race."⁸³⁶ and then states, "But Denney's statement expresses what Owen means."⁸³⁷ My own adjudication would be, first, that Packer is probably right in seeing Denney as closer to Owen than Denney realised, and second, that Denney is probably right in seeing that Owen does argue for a quantitative equivalence, and that it can't be as easily avoided as Packer thinks. However, it is clear that Owen held that there was a very strong equivalence.

Another issue that might seem to undermine equivalence is that if Christ's death was of infinite value then it might be that his suffering was not equivalent to any other individual's, but far greater. Owen argues that Christ's death was of infinite value, being sufficient for all mankind.

The value, worth, and dignity of the ransom which Christ gave himself to be, and of the price which he paid, was infinite and immeasurable; fit for the accomplishment of any end and the procuring of any good, for all and every one for whom it was intended, had they been millions of men more than ever were created.⁸³⁸

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

⁸³⁴ Packer, *Cross*, pp. 40-41, n. 43.

⁸³⁵ Denney, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40, no reference in Denney given.

⁸³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41, n. 43.

⁸³⁸ Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

Owen proceeds to affirm “that old distinction of the schoolmen, embraced and used by divers Protestant divines,... namely, “That Christ died for all in respect of the sufficiency of the ransom paid, but not in respect of the efficacy of its application;” ...”⁸³⁹ Owen then explains how this sacrifice could be of such value in the next quotation.

This sufficiency of his sacrifice hath a twofold rise: - First, The dignity of the person that did offer and was offered. Secondly, The greatness of the pain he endured, by which he was able to bear, and did undergo, the whole curse of the law and wrath of God due to sin.⁸⁴⁰

Owen does not discuss these two reasons any further. However, they raise at least three related questions: First, how are these two factors of dignity and pain related in their value? Second, could the dignity of the person mean that even if Christ had suffered little or no pain besides death, his sacrifice would still have been sufficient for all? Third, when Owen says that Christ underwent the whole curse of the law and wrath of God, does this mean that he suffered more than anyone else will in hell? In other words, was the suffering of the cross greater than the suffering of hell? The most likely interpretation is, I think, that Christ underwent the maximum intensity of suffering that any individual could experience in hell, rather than some multiple of the suffering of an individual, and that the sufficiency of the sacrifice comes from what Owen calls ‘the dignity of the person’, and in particular the union of the human nature with the Divine, which I have termed the ‘divine multiplier’.

Further, Owen explains why the death of Christ, though a sufficient satisfaction for all, was not efficient to save all. The problem is focused by Owen’s own contention that double payment of satisfaction can not be demanded by God. “That a second payment of a debt once paid, or a requiring of it, is not answerable to the justice which God demonstrated in setting forth Christ to be a propitiation of our sins, Rom. iii. 25.”⁸⁴¹ Owen’s response is that the distinction resides in the will of God. Having spoken of the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for the sins of all people, Owen continues,

That is its own true internal perfection and sufficiency. That it should be applied unto any, made a price for them, and become beneficial to them, according to the worth that is in it, is external to it, doth not arise from it, but merely depends upon the intention and will of God. It was in itself of infinite value and sufficiency to have been made a price to have bought and purchased all and every man in the world. That it did formally become a price for any is solely to

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

be ascribed to the purpose of God, intending their purchase and redemption by it. The intention of the offerer and acceptor that it should be for such, some, or any, is that which gives the formality of a price unto it; that is external. But the value and fitness of it be made a price ariseth from its own internal sufficiency.⁸⁴²

Owen therefore finds a resolution solely in the will of God, which is hidden to us. However this introduces an arbitrary element into the debate. It would seem that the reason Christ suffered as he did is not ultimately because of a necessary equivalence to the sufferings of the damned, but because the level was set by the will of God. This then breaks a necessary equivalence, even if Owen argues that in fact there is equivalence.

Owen resolves some other issues with a similar recourse to the will of God, which also serve to break a necessary equivalence, although in fact he maintains that God has chosen to maintain equivalence. Thus Owen argues that satisfaction is not necessary for God to have mercy on sinners. In responding to Arminius, he writes,

The foundation of this whole assertion seems to me to be false and erroneous, - namely, that God could not have mercy on mankind unless satisfaction were made by his Son."⁸⁴³ Again, "That neither Scripture nor right reason will enforce nor prove an utter and absolute want of power in God to save sinners by his own absolute will, without satisfaction to his justice, supposing his purpose that so it should be; indeed it could not be otherwise."⁸⁴⁴

However in a footnote, the editor notes that Owen later changed his mind on this question.

In the statements above, it is implied that salvation might have been accomplished without the absolute necessity of such a satisfaction to the claims of justice as the death of Christ afforded. Dr Owen, it will be found in [*De Divina Justitia*], latterly changed his views at this point, and held the necessity for the satisfaction of divine justice by an atonement, in order to [sic] salvation, to be absolute.- ED.⁸⁴⁵

As in the conclusion to the previous point, this arbitrary quality to Christ's satisfaction serves to break a necessary equivalence between the cross and hell, but equivalence can still be maintained. God could have chosen to set the level of satisfaction he required at exactly the level equivalent to the punishment of hell. Indeed, Owen's quotes above on the exact equivalence of Christ's satisfaction suggest exactly this.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 184, [Italics original.]

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-4. The editor is Edward Hickman. Carl R. Trueman offers a detailed study of this change in "John Owen's Dissertation on Divine Justice: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism," *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (April 1998), pp. 87-103.

A similar problem seems to arise when Owen argues that it's not necessary for God to punish.

God may, by virtue of his supreme dominion, omit punishment without any wrong or prejudice to his justice. It is as great a thing to impute sin where it is not, and to inflict punishment upon that imputation, as not to impute sin, where it is, and to remove or not to inflict punishment upon that non-imputation. Now the first of these God did towards Christ; and, therefore, he may do the latter.⁸⁴⁶

However, earlier Owen argues that while God relaxes the law, he only does so in allowing the debt to be paid by a surety. "The only Lawgiver, who alone had power so far to relax his own law as to have the name of a surety put into the obligation, which before was not there, and then to require the whole debt of that surety;..."⁸⁴⁷ Therefore there seems to be no necessary breaking of the equivalence between cross and hell at this point.

Owen's detail and clarity on the view that Christ experienced on the cross what sinners would in hell is such that he seeks to categorise the similarities and differences between the two experiences, drawing a distinction between the accidents and the substance of the suffering of the cross. However, the very clarity of the discussion tends to raise more sharply the question of whether this equivalence is persuasive.

I turn next to Jonathan Edwards⁸⁴⁸, who has some of the most detailed discussion on the degree of equivalence in the literature, rivalled only by Owen. Further, like Owen, he is one of the premier theologians of particular redemption, which I am suggesting leads to a stronger case for equivalence. However, Edwards is also seen by some as a precursor of the other line in Denney's 'punishment is satisfaction' stream: the spiritual/moral line, which was to reach clearer fruition in the vicarious repentance doctrine of Mcleod Campbell, who quotes Edwards as a source. It is this second line which I will suggest has some illuminating parallels with the modified Traditionalism I have proposed.

I will divide my study of Edwards into four parts, with the first and second in this section and the third and fourth in the following section where I examine links between

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁸⁴⁸ Mark Noll offers a striking comment on Edwards when he writes in the Foreword to Tidball's book on evangelicalism: "In defining how evangelicals should believe and act, Tidball follows the best authorities:

the atonement and Reconciliationism. First, and most importantly, I will address directly the issue of equivalence. Second, I will examine the question of the effect that Christ's divine nature is believed to have on the value of Christ's satisfaction (what I have termed the 'Divine Multiplier'.) Third, in the following section, I will examine the links to McLeod Campbell's doctrine of vicarious atonement, although there is some overlap with material in the first section. Finally, I will note some miscellaneous links to Blocher's modified Traditionalism.

So, first, I will examine Edwards' comments which bear directly on the issue of equivalence. In this extended quotation below, Edwards is primarily concerned to argue that the fate of the damned is worse than that of Christ on the cross, both in terms of the nature of the suffering and its duration. However he also states that there was an equivalence to the suffering, in terms of its objective nature as the wrath of God, differing rather in the nature of the subjects.

Let such senseless sinners consider, that that misery, of which they are in danger from the wrath of God, is infinitely more terrible than that, the fear of which occasioned in Christ his agony and bloody sweat. It is more terrible, both as it differs both in its nature and degree, and also as it differs in its duration.

1. It is more terrible in its nature and degree. Christ suffered that which, as it upheld the honour of the divine law, was fully equivalent to the misery of the damned; and in some respect it was the same suffering; for it was the wrath of the same God; yet in other respects it vastly differed. The difference does not arise from the difference in the wrath poured out on one and the other, for it is the same wrath, but from the difference of the subject, which may be best illustrated from Christ's own comparison. Luke xxiii. 31. "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Here he calls himself the green tree and wicked men the dry, intimating that the misery that will come on wicked men will be far more dreadful than those sufferings which came on him, and the differences arise from the different nature of the subject. The green tree and the dry are both cast into the fire; but the flames seize and kindle on the dry tree much more fiercely than on the green. The sufferings that Christ endured differ from the misery of the wicked in hell in nature and degree in the following respects.

1. Christ felt not the gnawings of a guilty, condemning conscience.

2. He felt no torment from reigning of inward corruptions and lusts as the damned do. The wicked in hell are their own tormentors, their lusts are their tormentors, and being without restraint, (for there is no restraining grace in hell,) their lusts will rage like raging flames in their hearts. They shall be tormented with the unrestrained violence of a spirit of envy and malice against God, and

against the angels and saints in heaven, and against one another. Now Christ suffered nothing of this.

3. Christ had not to consider that God hated him. The wicked in hell have this to make their misery perfect, they know that God perfectly hates them without the least pity or regard to them, which will fill their souls with inexpressible misery. But it was not so with Christ. God withdrew his comfortable presence from Christ, and hid his face from him, and so poured out his wrath upon him, as made him feel its terrible effects in his soul; but yet he knew at the same time that God did not hate him, but infinitely loved him. He cried out of God forsaking him, but yet at the same time calls him "My God, my God!" knowing that he was his God still, though he has forsaken him. But the wicked in hell will know that he is not their God, but their judge and irreconcilable enemy.

4. Christ did not suffer despair, as the wicked do in hell. He knew that there would be an end to his sufferings in a few hours; and that after that he should enter into eternal glory. But it will be far otherwise with you that are impenitent; if you die in your present condition, you will be in perfect despair. On these accounts, the misery of the wicked in hell will be immensely more dreadful in nature and degree, than those sufferings with the fears of which Christ's soul was so much overwhelmed.

2. It will infinitely differ in duration. Christ's sufferings lasted but a few hours, and there was an eternal end to them, and eternal glory succeeded. But you that are secure, senseless sinner, are every day exposed to sufferings, immensely more dreadful in nature and degree, and that are to be without any end, but must be endured without any rest day or night for ever and ever! If you had a full sense of the greatness of that misery to which you are exposed, and how dreadful your present condition is on that account, it would this moment put you into as dreadful agony as that Christ underwent; yea, if your nature could endure it, one more dreadful. We should now see you fall down in a bloody sweat, wallowing in your gore, and crying out in terrible amazement.⁸⁴⁹

This might seem to settle the issue for Edwards: there is a lack of equivalence at crucial points since the damned suffer more severely than Christ, although they both suffer the same wrath of God. In particular, Edwards is explicit that they had different experiences of the length of torment, with Christ not suffering the unending torments of a traditionalist hell. However, elsewhere Edwards writes in a way which seems to give evidence for a stronger link. The chief source of relevant discussion is Edwards' *Concerning the Necessity and Reasonableness of the Christian Doctrine of Satisfaction for Sin*. (Remarks on Important Theological Controversies, Chapter V).⁸⁵⁰ I begin with a brief, but general, statement of equivalence. "That Christ indeed suffered the full punishment of the sin that was imputed to him, or offered that to God that was fully and

⁸⁴⁹ Edwards, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 871ff.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 565 ff.

completely equivalent to what we owed to divine justice for our sins, is evident by Psalm lxix.5...⁸⁵¹ A longer, and more detailed, passage, introduces at least three further important ideas. First, Edwards makes the interesting observation that temporal death “is a great image of eternal death,” thus suggesting that although there is an infinite difference in their degree, there is still some kind of link. Second, Edwards now lists some of the ways in which the suffering of Christ was *greater* than that of the damned. Again, this may serve to weaken equivalence just as much as the points above about Christ’s suffering being less, but there may be some higher synthesis. Third, and most significant, Edwards argues that the idea of hell is the equivalent of the thing itself. This opens up the possibility that if Christ could have the idea of an unending torment, he could be said in some sense to have experienced it.

Christ suffered the wrath of God for men’s sins in such a way as he was capable of, being an infinitely holy person, who knew that God was not angry with him personally, knew that God did not hate him, but infinitely loved him. The wicked in hell suffer the wrath of God, as they will have the sense, and knowledge, and sight of God’s infinite displeasure towards them and hatred of them. But this was impossible in Jesus Christ. Christ therefore could bear the wrath of God in no other but these two ways.

I. In having a great and clear sight of the infinite wrath of God against the sin of men, and the punishment they had deserved... The sight of evil of sin tended to this, and so did the enduring of temporal death, that is a great image of eternal death, especially under such circumstances, with such extreme pain, God’s hiding his face, his dying a death that by God’s appointment was an accursed death, having a sight of the malice and triumph of devils, and being forsaken of his friends, &c.... Thus, Christ bare our sins; God laid on him the iniquities of us all, and he bare the burden of them; and so, his bearing the burden of our sins may be considered as something diverse from his suffering God’s wrath. For his suffering wrath consisted more in the sense he had of the other thing, viz. The dreadfulness of the punishment of sin, or the dreadfulness of the punishment inflicted for it. Thus, Christ was tormented not only in the fire of God’s wrath, but in the fire of our sins;...

Thus Christ suffered that which the damned in hell do not suffer. For they do not see the hateful nature of sin. They have no idea of sin in itself, that is infinitely disagreeable to their nature, as the idea of sin was to Christ’s holy nature; though conscience in them be awakened to behold the dreadful guilt and desert of sin. And as the clear view of sin in its hatefulness necessarily brought great suffering on the holy soul of Christ; so also did the view of its punishment. For both the evil of sin and the evil of punishment are infinite evils, and both infinitely disagreeable to Christ’s nature; the former to his holy nature, or his nature as God, the latter to his human nature, or his nature as man. Such is human nature, that a great, and clear, and full idea of suffering, without some other pleasant and sweet idea to balance it, brings suffering; as appears from the

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 576.

nature of all spiritual ideas. They are repetitions (in a degree at least) of the things themselves of which they are ideas. Therefore, if Christ had a perfectly clear and full idea of what the damned suffer in hell the suffering he would have had in the mere presence of that idea, would have been perfectly equal to the thing itself, if there had been no idea in Christ in any degree to balance it; such as, some knowledge of the love of God, of a future reward, future salvation of his elect, &c. But pleasant ideas in this clearness being in a great measure withholden by reason of God's hiding his face; hence, the awful ideas of eternal death which his elect people deserved, and of the dismal wrath of God, of consequence filled the soul of Christ with an inexpressible gloom.⁸⁵²

In this last paragraph Edwards begins with a statement undermining equivalence. It is noteworthy that the reasons he gives for the lack of equivalence are eased on a reconciliationist view of hell since sin is recognised as a punishment and punishment is acknowledged as a good. However Edwards himself then strongly reaffirms equivalence towards the end. This latter argument is particularly significant, because Edwards argues that to have the idea of hell, is equivalent to the experience of hell itself. Although Edwards has been arguing earlier that Christ did not have the same idea as the damned because he knew of the love of God, in this paragraph, Edwards argues that God largely withdrew such pleasant ideas, presumably leaving Christ in a similar position as the damned. Thus, in the final sentence, Edwards seems to argue that Christ experienced the idea of eternal death (understood as unending torment), and thus presumably he could be said to have suffered it. This therefore serves as a strong case for equivalence. Edwards goes on to spell out this key psychological principle, that he is basing his argument on, at greater length in the following statement:

A strong exercise of love exercises a lively idea of the object beloved. And a strong exercise of pity excites a lively idea of the misery under which he pities them. Christ's love then brought his elect infinitely near to him in that great act and suffering wherein he especially stood for them, and was substitute in their stead: and his love and pity fixed the idea of them in his mind, as if he had really been they; and fixed their calamity in his mind, as though it really was his. A very strong and lively love and pity towards the miserable, tends to make their case ours; as in other respects, so in this in particular, as it doth in our idea place us in their stead, under their misery, with a most lively, feeling sense of that misery, as it were feeling it for them, actually suffering it in their stead by strong sympathy.⁸⁵³

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 574.

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

Thus Edwards seems to argue that Christ's suffering comes in large part through sympathetic entering into the experience of the damned. It is this principle that McLeod Campbell saw as a precursor of his own theory of vicarious repentance, of which I will say more below. However, Edwards then indicates that although this is the greater reason for his suffering, it is not the only one, and then proceeds to give as the second reason one which sounds much more like the traditional understanding of substitution in which Christ suffers the thing itself, and not simply the idea of it:

The suffering of his soul in great part consisted in the great and dreadful sense and idea that he then had given him of the dreadful, horrid odiousness of sin; which was done by the Spirit of God...

II. Another way in which it was possible that Christ should endure the wrath of God was, to endure the effects of that wrath...⁸⁵⁴

Then Edwards argues that Christ's experience of the loss of his Father's love is as great as the damned experience of God's hatred.

God dealt with him as if he had been exceedingly angry with him, and as though he had been the object of his dreadful wrath. This made all the sufferings of Christ the more terrible to him [Christ], because they were from the hand of his Father, whom he infinitely loved, and whose infinite love he had had eternal experience of. Besides, it was an effect of God's wrath that he forsook Christ. This caused Christ to cry out... "My God my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This was infinitely terrible to Christ. Christ's knowledge of the glory of the Father, and his love to the Father, and the sense and experience he had had of the worth of the Father's love to him, made the withholding of the pleasant ideas and manifestations of his Father's love as terrible to him, as the sense and knowledge of his hatred is to the damned, that have no knowledge of God's excellency, no love to him, nor any experience of the infinite sweetness of his love.⁸⁵⁵

Edwards also speculates that God permits the devil his role in tormenting Christ specifically to create an equivalency with the experience of the damned: "He was let loose to torment the soul of Christ with gloomy and dismal ideas. He probably did his uttermost to contribute to raise his ideas to the torments of hell."⁸⁵⁶

Edwards seems to hold to the traditional position that the hypostatic union serves to multiply the value of Christ's suffering in his human nature. Edwards uses a metaphor to make this point, which is reminiscent of one used by Anselm. Strictly speaking it doesn't demand that Christ was divine, but simply a human of great dignity, in order to make satisfaction for many, but in context the assumption is that Christ's dignity is

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

greater because of his divine nature. "If the patron be, in the eyes of him whose favour is sought, of very great dignity, it is agreeable to reason and nature that this should have influence to procure greater favour to the client than if he were of less dignity." Edwards also suggests other types of multiplier: not just the dignity of the one suffering, but the dignity of the one insulted and the meanness of the one insulting:

As an indignity is always rated by the presumption, and as the presumption bears an exact proportion to the meanness of the person insulting, and to the greatness of the party insulted; so, in like manner, all acts of condescension are estimated by the humility, and that again by the dignity, of the condescending person, and by the lowness and demerit of the party condescended to.⁸⁵⁷

A further multiplier is the infinite regard given by Christ to God the Father. "The value of Christ's sacrifice was infinite, both as a propitiation, and as an act of obedience; because he showed an infinite regard to the majesty, holiness, &c. of God, in being at infinite expense from regard to those divine attributes."⁸⁵⁸ Again, this doesn't necessitate a divine person, and if it doesn't then it would serve as a further piece of evidence of similarity to McLeod Campbell and the notion of vicarious atonement.

Edwards also holds that Christ's satisfaction was efficacious for many because of his representative federal headship.

The satisfaction of Christ, by suffering the punishment of sin, is properly to be distinguished, as being in its own nature different from the merit of Christ. For merit is only some excellency or worth. But when we consider Christ's sufferings merely as the satisfaction for the guilt of another, the excellency of Christ's act of suffering does not all come into consideration; but only these two things, viz. Their equality or equivalence to the punishment that the sinner deserved; and 2ndly, The union between him and them, or the propriety of his being accepted in suffering, as the representative of the sinner.⁸⁵⁹

Edwards' point is that the ability of the person to make satisfaction does not depend upon their worthiness; it simply requires the criteria to be fulfilled. Edwards then concludes with this intriguing debate:

If the law be fulfilled, there is no need of any excellency or merit to satisfy it; because it is satisfied by taking place and having its course. Indeed, how far the dignity or worthiness of Christ's person comes into consideration, in determining the propriety of his being accepted as a representative of sinners, so

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 573.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

that his suffering, when equivalent, can be accepted as theirs, may be a matter of question and debate; but it is a matter entirely foreign to the present purpose.⁸⁶⁰

In conclusion, Edwards, in what is probably the most detailed discussion of equivalence in the whole tradition, spends a lot of time focusing on the points of dissimilarity between the cross and hell, while still furnishing much material to indicate that he held to equivalence. Thus, again, there are two positions proposed by Edwards which suggest that Christ suffered simply in his human nature, and thus either would serve to establish a strong equivalence. The two positions are first, where Christ simply suffers in his human nature, and the divine nature multiplies its value; second, where Christ's federal headship extends its value. However, I will argue below that this equivalence would be strengthened if one held that the damned, rather than being full of hatred for God, were also able to appreciate the loss of the love of God and to acknowledge his other qualities.

I will also briefly note one contemporary evangelical author in this legal/material stream, J.I. Packer. As I have noted above, McGrath claims that Packer is possibly the most important evangelical theologian in the twentieth century. While I find this a surprising claim, it certainly shows that Packer is an important evangelical theologian. In his paper *What Did The Cross Achieve?* Packer defends the doctrine of penal substitution, arguing that limited atonement follows from this. He makes a number of clear statements of equivalence:

Should we not then think of Christ's substitution for us on the cross as a definite, one-to-one relationship between him and each individual sinner? This seems scriptural,... Christ specifically took and discharged my penal obligation as a sinner,...⁸⁶¹ Again, "Jesus Christ... took our place under judgement and received in his own personal experience all the dimensions of the death that was our sentence, whatever these were, so laying the foundation for our pardon and immunity."⁸⁶² Again, "...what Christ bore on the cross was the Godforsakenness of penal judgement."⁸⁶³

However Packer is also sensitive to what he believes are weaknesses in the formulations of Owen and Edwards, and favours those of the Magisterial reformers: "much of the

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

⁸⁶¹ Packer, *Cross*, p. 36.

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

formative and influential discussing of penal substitution was done in the seventeenth century, at a time when Protestant exegesis of Scripture was coloured by an uncriticized and indeed unrecognized natural theology of law..."⁸⁶⁴ It is also Packer who, as I noted above, offers what I think is an unnatural interpretation of Owen, arguing that he held that equivalence was not to be measured in quantitative terms. However such is the unqualified equivalence in Packer's own statements that it is the tendency of his own position too towards such quantitative measurement.⁸⁶⁵ However, Packer is still a clear and important witness for two propositions. First, he argues that penal substitution and limited atonement are the mainstream positions in the evangelical theological heritage, and indeed that the latter is the necessary consequence of the former. Second, Packer argues that equivalence follows from this doctrine of the atonement.

In conclusion, Denney's taxonomy has been helpful in highlighting that the clearest and strongest statements of equivalence lie down Stream 1 (punishment is satisfaction) and down Line 1 (the legal/material). A further refinement I have introduced is that equivalence is clearest in theologians who hold to a limited atonement.

If Annihilationists are not to abandon their doctrine of hell because of the reasons adduced in the first section above, they are committed to at least one of three courses of action, each of which raises further problems for evangelicals. First, annihilationists could argue that the doctrine of penal substitution is to be significantly changed or rejected. Clearly annihilationists have already rejected the traditional evangelical doctrine of hell, but to change or reject so central and widely held a doctrine for evangelicals as penal substitution would at least raise doubts for evangelicals assessing the doctrinal implications of Annihilationism, and might lead to its rejection. Second, annihilationists could argue that the theologians I have studied are wrong in their belief in a link between hell and the atonement. However in rejecting this link, Annihilationists are rejecting the conclusion of important theologians in the evangelical tradition. Harmon makes a similar point about the doctrine of hell itself, and in doing so highlights the importance of three of the theologians I have studied.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41, n. 43.

The great majority of the finest theologians in the church for the last twenty centuries have held to the traditional view... This in itself is not definitive - the Scriptures are always the final court of appeal. But it does mean that if we are going to disagree with Augustine and Aquinas and Luther and Calvin and Edwards (to name only a few among so many) we need to have extremely strong grounds for doing so and the burden of proof is on those who wish to change the traditional doctrine.⁸⁶⁶

Further, it is difficult to see on what grounds annihilationists could reject the belief that equivalence is established by penal substitution. I will comment on this further after noting a third strategy. A third course of action is a combination of the two arguments above. Annihilationists could argue that equivalence is most strongly established on the basis of a doctrine of limited atonement, and that only this needs to be rejected rather than the broader doctrine of penal substitution. If this conclusion could be justified, it would indeed lessen this objection to Annihilationism based on equivalence, since limited atonement is not held by all evangelicals to be the necessary consequence of penal substitution, and therefore its rejection would not be as problematic. However problems remain. First, as Packer claims, limited atonement has a claim to be the inheritor of the mainstream reformation position to which evangelicals have a strong loyalty, and has been held by some of the greatest and most representative theologians in the evangelical tradition. Therefore the necessary rejection of limited atonement still raises doubts about Annihilationism and weakens its claim for many evangelicals. Second, and more significantly, equivalence is still usually believed to be established even where there is no definite espousal of limited atonement, or even where it is rejected as a consequence of penal substitution. Luther is an example of a theologian who argues for equivalence but doesn't espouse limited atonement. It is striking though that every evangelical in the recent literature who comments on the link assumes that equivalence is established, and only disagrees with others over the implications, although it is unlikely that they all hold to a doctrine of limited atonement. So even annihilationists who comment on the link assume that equivalence is established. Third, in development of this point that equivalence is established on the basis of penal substitution even if limited atonement is rejected, I would argue that the key distinctive element of Annihilationism, extinction, is not amenable to a weak link. In other words, Christ either suffered extinction or he did not. If he did not suffer extinction then it is very hard to see how he could be a penal substitute, since he did not suffer an essential and distinct part of the punishment due to sinners. Indeed it is *the*

⁸⁶⁶ Harmon, *Case*, p. 200.

distinct part of the punishment of an annihilationist hell. The only option for annihilationists who don't want to abandon a doctrine of penal substitution is to argue that extinction is not penal, and therefore Christ did not have to suffer it. However, not only have I argued that extinction is penal, but also every annihilationist who comments on the issue argues that Christ did suffer extinction as well as torment. Therefore, although equivalence is more firmly established by limited atonement, it is nonetheless adequately established for this argument by the more general doctrine of penal substitution.

Therefore I conclude that annihilationists cannot avoid unorthodox conclusions about the incarnation and resurrection unless they reject a doctrine of penal substitution. However, to reject the standard evangelical doctrine of the atonement would be considered a highly problematic consequence by annihilationists, and so I would expect that were these conclusions accepted as necessary they would change their doctrine of hell.

4.4 Implications of Reconciliationism

In this third section I will examine the link between the atonement and the modified Traditionalism which I have proposed in the previous chapters, and which I have termed Reconciliationism. In outline I want to argue that there is still equivalence between a reconciliationist hell and the cross with the consequence that annihilationists are forced to make the choice I have stated above. I also want to suggest that there may actually be a stronger equivalence between Reconciliationism and the atonement than between a classic traditionalist hell and even a doctrine of limited atonement, and thus if Reconciliationism is accepted, the challenge to Annihilationism is even more firmly established.

I will begin my discussion of the equivalence established by Reconciliationism by examining the discussion in the literature. Blocher does not address the issue at all and in the nineteenth century debate only Birks deals with it at any length, albeit more broadly, while Clarke is the only writer who addresses the issue of equivalence directly, albeit briefly. I will conclude that Birks and Clarke are unable to establish equivalence, although Clarke assumes that there is. I will then argue that my own development of

Blocher's position has significant differences on this issue from that of Birks and Clarke which may lead to a closer equivalence not only than its nineteenth century forerunners, but also than classic Traditionalism. I will also suggest that there are some striking parallels between the experience of Christ as suggested by Reconciliationism and as described by writers such as McLeod Campbell who hold to a doctrine of the atonement sometimes termed 'vicarious repentance'.

Turning first to Birks, he is not only the chief nineteenth century proponent of Reconciliationism, but he also writes more extensively on the atonement in the context of discussions of hell than any other Reconciliationist. Birks writes so extensively on the atonement because it is one of the arguments for Reconciliationism he rests the greatest weight on. He begins his *Letter On Eternal Judgement* with these words: "The doctrine of the Atonement is closely linked with the teaching of Scripture concerning the solemn truth of judgement to come."⁸⁶⁷ Birks argues that his doctrine of hell follows from a doctrine of a universal atonement.

I plainly assume, as alike revealed, that Christ died for all, and that many souls do perish in sin. The question must arise: Has Christ in their case died wholly in vain? Is the sole object and result of His death to redouble and increase their perfect misery? The doctrine of particular redemption removes the difficulty, by affirming that Christ died only for the elect Church, and did not bear the sin of the whole world, but of believers alone. I have rejected this view,...⁸⁶⁸

Birks answers his rhetorical questions in the negative and argues that the atonement did indeed gain benefit for the damned. In particular the death of Christ enabled the damned to avoid the hell of classic Traditionalism and only to suffer the modified hell of Reconciliationism. Birks notes that it is commonly agreed by traditionalists that the atonement gained something for the damned as well as the righteous, that is resurrection. He then goes further and argues that the atonement gained more than merely resurrection for the damned. Discussing the dilemma of Christ dying for all, but not all being saved, Candlish summarises Birks' position:

The solution is to be found, it seems, in the distinction between the two deaths. It is assumed, that while, as a consequence of the atonement, the saved enjoy all spiritual and eternal good, the lost as well as they have the good of a present respite of forbearance and grace, a resurrection to judgement, and beyond that, the second death. The connection of the first of these with the atonement is

⁸⁶⁷ Birks, *Victory*, p. 167.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 252. The doctrine of 'particular redemption' is the same as that of 'limited atonement'.

admitted by all. That of the second is denied by many of us. But the point is about the third: - the second death.⁸⁶⁹

So, Christ's death saved the damned from the first death, which Birks understood to be that of classic Traditionalism, and left them to suffer only the second death which he understood to be his reconciliationist hell. Candlish argues Birks holds that sin as debt is dealt with by the atonement, but sin as disease is only dealt with when there is repentance and faith. Again, more briefly, Candlish argues that Birks must hold that Christ died for sins, but not for sin, and concludes that the damned "are condemned in the judgment, not as breakers of the law, but as rejecters of the gospel."⁸⁷⁰

Before turning to examine the issue of equivalence on Birks' position, I will first examine his doctrine of the atonement, over which there is a certain amount of disagreement. Birks clearly held both to a doctrine of penal substitution and a doctrine of universal, as opposed to limited, atonement in which Christ died for all. Birks describes his own position as "moderately Calvinistic, or, to speak more correctly, temperately Augustinian, in my views on theology"⁸⁷¹ and repudiates the idea that he was an Arminian. However Candlish suggests that he was an Arminian, and Rowell judges that "there would seem to have been some justice in Candlish's suggestion that [Birks] was an Arminian despite Birks' repudiation of the idea."⁸⁷² The difference of opinion occurs, I suspect, because Birks holds a different understanding of the impact of the atonement on what he calls the first death (the classic traditionalist hell) and the second death (his reconciliationist hell). Thus the atonement actually gained some blessings for all people, saving them from the first death, but only the possibility of salvation from the second death. A further quote serves to clarify Birks' position.

I do hold, indeed, that the sin of each, as a debt of guilt from the breach of perfect law, was cancelled on the cross... But I do not hold that the present guilt of any one, in the rejection of grace and disbelief of God's promise, is cancelled until he repents and believes.⁸⁷³

Candlish also quotes an example used by Birks to illustrate his position: a friend may pay the debt of someone to have them released from prison, but that doesn't mean that he has also issued an invitation for them to join his family.⁸⁷⁴ Therefore, as I argued in

⁸⁶⁹ Birks, quoted by Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸⁷⁰ Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸⁷¹ Birks, *Atonement*, p. 11.

⁸⁷² Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁸⁷³ Birks, *Atonement*, p. 21.

⁸⁷⁴ Birks, *Victory*, p. 165, quoted by Candlish, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

the previous chapter, it would also be inaccurate to call Birks a Universalist, although this was a charge that was sometimes made against him, since the atonement doesn't gain all the benefits of the righteous for the damned.

I now turn to the question of what sort of equivalence Birks holds. Birks doesn't address the issue directly, but I want to argue that his position undermines any equivalence. As I have noted, Birks holds that the effect of the atonement is to save the damned from the torments of the first death, which are broadly the same as the classic traditionalist hell, and to translate them to the reconciled state of the second death, which is a mitigation of Traditionalism and yet less blessed than heaven. Therefore, on a penal substitutionary model, Christ must have suffered the torments of the first death in order to save the damned from them. Thus Christ suffered what the damned do not suffer, but rather what they would have suffered had he not died for them. This is identical to the logic all evangelicals would accept with respect to the lack of equivalence of the atonement and the righteous: Christ suffered what the blessed do not suffer. Thus Birks is unable to establish equivalence on these premises.

If this conclusion is true for all reconciliationists, that they are unable to establish equivalence, then the charge I have made against Annihilationists in relation to the atonement is greatly weakened if one adopts this modified Traditionalism. However, I do not think that reconciliationists are required to draw this conclusion. Indeed, as I have suggested, I believe that Reconciliationism may actually establish a closer equivalence than classic Traditionalism. I will examine this issue of equivalence from three aspects. First I will note Birks' own alternative, and argue that this highlights the basic change that needs to be made to establish equivalence. Second, I will examine the only explicit statement about equivalence in the nineteenth century debate. Although Langton Clarke claims that there is equivalence, he doesn't provide any extended discussion, and his view of hell has some important differences from that of Blocher's. So, third, I will argue that my own position based on Blocher offers some suggestive points of equivalence which may be even stronger than those of classic Traditionalism.

So, first, I note that Birks himself recognises that his conclusion would change if he held what he calls 'a doctrine of particular redemption'. On this limited atonement position

Christ did not die for the damned, and therefore equivalence is re-established. What is uncertain is whether Birks thinks that he could abandon his doctrine of universal atonement, as he understands it, and still hold to his reconciliationist conclusions. Certainly Birks sees his doctrine of the atonement as a very important argument for his position, but it is not the only one, and I think that Birks would still hold his position with a different doctrine of the atonement. Indeed Reconciliationism is quite compatible with a doctrine of penal substitution and even limited atonement. Thus equivalence can be established if Christ's experience can be shown to be compatible with that of a reconciliationist hell, which I hope to suggest below. The main difference between Blocher's position and Birks' at this point is that the damned are not the beneficiaries of any additional mitigations as a result of the atonement as compared to the classic traditionalist position. The reason for the state of the damned on Blocher's understanding of a Reconciliationist hell is to do with justice rather than grace through the atoning work of Christ. Therefore this developed view of Reconciliationism sits easily with a doctrine of the atonement in which Christ's death gains no additional benefits for the damned, including limited atonement. Therefore, having suggested that limited atonement is understood in the tradition to lead to a stronger equivalence, I would argue that Reconciliationism can also establish such an equivalence with the conclusion that Annihilationism is still to be rejected.

Second, another reconciliationist in the nineteenth century debate who takes a different view from Birks is Langton Clarke. Indeed, his is the only other argument based on a link with the atonement in the reconciliationist literature. His brief discussion foreshadows one of the annihilationist objections against Traditionalism from the atonement which I have noted above, which is that Christ could not have suffered a classic traditionalist hell on the cross. Clarke's response is to accept the same logic as that of recent annihilationists, but to argue for Reconciliationism rather than Annihilationism. Thus,

20. If, as is the belief of the Catholic Church, our Lord took our punishments upon Himself, and suffered for us ("the just for the unjust") all that we should have had to suffer if unredeemed, how can He be said to have suffered our due and destined punishment, if that punishment consisted in hopeless and endless torment? Can it be for one moment contended for as conceivable, that His sufferings, intense as they were during His short life on earth, so infinitely exceeded all the torments of the damned, that they were equal to innumerable

millions of years in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone? If not, then He has not undergone our punishments; He has not taken upon Himself all the stripes that would have fallen on us.⁸⁷⁵

I would note a number of things from this paragraph. First, like Birks, Clarke holds a doctrine of penal substitution. Second, again like Birks, Clarke holds that the hell of Reconciliationism is a significant mitigation of the traditionalist view. This is the implication of his statement that Christ could not have suffered 'hopeless and endless torments', and therefore, by equivalence, neither do the damned. Third, unlike Birks, Clarke's argument rests on the assumption that there is an equivalence between the cross and hell. He states that this equivalence is 'the belief of the Catholic church'. This is a major difference between Clarke and Birks. Fourth, Clarke doesn't argue here that this mitigation of hell is itself an effect of the atonement. It is therefore likely that Clarke differs from Birks. Clarke is therefore an example of a writer who holds that reconciliation and equivalence can be maintained. However, Clarke suffers from two particular limitations with regards to my aim of establishing equivalence for Reconciliationism. First, in his brief discussion Clarke doesn't clarify his argument nor suggest in what ways Christ's experience on the cross *is* like that of the damned. Second, as I have touched on in the previous chapter, Clarke's understanding of the state of the damned in hell is significantly different from my own development of Blocher, in particular in his understanding of the continuation of choice for the damned and the possibility of translation to heaven. Therefore I will now seek to develop the argument for equivalence on the basis of Reconciliationism as I have defined it and to argue not only that equivalence can be established, but to suggest it may actually be stronger than classic Traditionalism.

Blocher's thesis, as I have expounded and developed it, suggests that the damned in hell are not in a state of continuing rebellion against God. Rather their state can be described as having four features distinct from the classic traditionalist position, all but the first being closely related. First, the damned are fixed. Second, they don't continue to sin. Third, they are lucid, understanding and accepting the justice of their punishment. Fourth, since they accept the judgement of God, they are to that degree at least reconciled to God. Blocher does not explore the issue of equivalence, but I will

⁸⁷⁵ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

comment on each of these four features, and suggest how they might relate to experience of Christ on the cross.

First, fixity is the feature from which equivalence can least easily be established.

However I have also argued that it is not an essential feature of Reconciliationism, and could be removed without rejecting the whole doctrine. Evidence for equivalence might be the silence and inactivity of Christ, along with the darkness, during his last three hours on the cross, which suggests an experience closer to that of fixed contemplation of the awfulness of sin and divine wrath than the raging and rebellion of the damned in a classic traditionalist hell. Further, as I suggested in chapter two, a reconciliationist hell can be understood as a finite punishment, since this would offer a response to the annihilationist objection that Christ could not suffer endless torment. However, it seems difficult to speculate on what Christ experienced on the cross with enough precision to adjudicate between these options, and while I have argued that Christ could not have experienced extinction, it is unclear whether a divine person could have experienced an infinite punishment, as Edwards argues above, or a state of fixity, understood either as temporal or a-temporal. I therefore conclude that Blocher's thesis offers no decisive conclusion on this related issue.

The other three features of Blocher's position are all, I have argued, closely linked, and indeed overlap. Certainly Christ did not sin, and so there would seem to be closer equivalence with the damned in a reconciliationist hell than a classic traditionalist hell. However, perhaps the closer equivalence is found with the notions of lucidity and reconciliation. First, it is highly likely that Christ is fully lucid and realises the nature of the sin that has resulted in this punishment. While I have argued that if lucidity is a moral attribute then there are limits to how much the damned can know of God and therefore the true nature and extent of their sin, nonetheless this is still much closer to the hell of Reconciliationism. It is also likely that Christ is reconciled to his punishment in that he accepts its justice, and to have recognised the goodness or praiseworthiness of God, for to do otherwise would have been to sin. Again, this is much closer to Reconciliationism than Traditionalism.

Perhaps the most striking parallels to the experience of the damned in a reconciliationist hell come from theologians who hold to a doctrine of the atonement sometimes termed 'vicarious repentance'. Thus Denney quotes McLeod Campbell as to what Christ suffered:

He [Christ] who so responds to the divine wrath against sin... is necessarily receiving the full apprehension and realisation of that wrath, as well as of that sin against which it comes forth into His soul and spirit, into the bosom of the divine humanity,..."⁸⁷⁶ Further, "by that perfect response in Amen to the mind of God in relation to sin is the wrath of God rightly met, and that is accorded to divine justice which is its due, and could alone satisfy it."⁸⁷⁷

However, even if one doesn't hold to a doctrine of vicarious repentance, a proponent of penal substitution could still agree with these remarks. Indeed Packer argues that Denney does hold to the substance of the penal substitution position, despite disowning the name, and is thus a witness for precisely this argument. Packer writes, "It seems to me that these affirmations point straight to a way of formulating the penal substitution model which is... inclusive of all that the concept means to those who embrace it."⁸⁷⁸ In fact Denney actually uses 'penal' language at one point, albeit with careful qualification.

[W]hile the agony and the Passion were not penal in the sense of coming upon Jesus through a bad conscience, or making Him the personal object of divine wrath, they were penal in the sense that in the dark hour He had to realise to the full the divine reaction against sin in the race in which He was incorporated, and that without doing so to the uttermost He could not have been the Redeemer of that race from sin, or the Reconciler of sinful men to God... we see the events of Jesus' last hours... as an experience in which He knew what it was to be appalled, in an agony, stricken and desolate...⁸⁷⁹

Further, Packer believes that Denney is right to see the moral and personal nature of punishment, rather than merely the external and quantitative. And in this perception there would seem to be a stronger equivalence.

In conclusion, I believe that I have shown that if annihilationists retain their doctrine of hell, and their understanding of equivalence between hell and the cross established by penal substitution, then they are required to draw unorthodox conclusions about the nature of the incarnation, in particular its cessation at Christ's death, and the

⁸⁷⁶ Denney, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-9 quoting John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement, and its relation to remission of sins and eternal life* (4th ed., London: Macmillan, 1873), pp. 117-9.

⁸⁷⁷ Denney, *op. cit.*, p. 259, quoting McLeod Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁸⁷⁸ Packer, *Cross*, p. 29.

⁸⁷⁹ Denney, *op. cit.*, p. 273. [Italics mine.]

resurrection. These conclusions are such that most evangelicals would believe them unacceptable. An alternative resolution of this problem would be to deny that there is such an equivalence between the experience of Christ and the damned based on penal substitution. However, I have argued that some of the theologians most influential for evangelicals in the tradition have held that precisely such an equivalence follows from penal substitution. Alternatively, annihilationists could reject penal substitution, but this would also be held by most to be an unacceptable option. Thus I believe that evangelical annihilationists face a trilemma. They must give up important elements of one of the following three doctrines: their doctrine of the incarnation/resurrection; their doctrine of penal substitution; or their doctrine of hell. However, since the first two doctrinal areas are not only better established in the tradition, but arguably more important, this trilemma serves as a strong incentive to re-examine Annihilationism. If there are other grounds for questioning Annihilationism, as I have suggested there are in this thesis, I would argue that this third doctrine would be the one to reject. Whether or not this is the course evangelical annihilationists take will depend ultimately on their being convinced from Scripture. But I believe that this thesis has served to show not only that their position is not as convincing as they have argued, but also that there is a more persuasive alternative doctrine.

Conclusion

Evangelicalism is one of the few sections of the church which has retained a belief in the traditional doctrine of hell. Over the last twenty five years this doctrine has increasingly been criticised, largely from the perspective of Annihilationism which has rapidly become the leading alternative. However, there has been relatively little assessment of Annihilationism at the doctrinal level, both in terms of what the position itself entails, and also in terms of the criticisms it makes of Traditionalism. I have argued in chapters two and three that the chief doctrinal arguments in the literature, revolving around issues of justice and dualism, are not as successful as annihilationists claim, and that they have frequently overlooked the doctrinal implications of their own position, often because their position has not been clearly formulated. My most decisive criticisms of Annihilationism, though, come in chapter four where, on the basis of an equivalence of the cross and hell, I have argued that Annihilationism leads to unorthodox conclusions, and therefore should be rejected by evangelicals.

However annihilationist arguments have served to highlight real weaknesses in the classic traditionalist position. This is most clearly the case with its dualism, due to the continued sin of the damned. Some of the resources for response lay within the very theological tradition which is being criticised, but they are elements that have not been brought into their proper place. Thus there is a recognition in the tradition that the damned are lucid, but this has been limited to the Last Judgment. The failure to maintain this in the hell of classic Traditionalism means that it is not a fully just, and therefore moral, punishment. However, building on the work of Blocher, I believe that this conception should be understood as a permanent feature of the state of the damned in hell, along with the related notions of an end to sin and reconciliation. Therefore the damned come to fully recognise the justice, and horror, of their state. From this it follows that many common notions of and apologies for hell are to be rejected, including that the damned continue to hate God, or reject their judgment, or gain 'dark pleasures' or comfort from their continued rebellion, or that they prefer hell to heaven. Perhaps most significantly in the wider debate about hell, this leads to a rejection of any 'free-will defence' of hell, where hell is justified because the damned choose to go

there.⁸⁸⁰ I have argued that in one sense the damned do choose hell, but they do so because they recognise that it is their just punishment and as such is a good to be welcomed, rather than because they choose to live apart from God. I don't argue that Reconciliationism entirely resolves the problem of what I have called salvation dualism, but I do think that it offers a better resolution than both classic Traditionalism and also than Annihilationism since the damned have a greater good to fulfil than mere extinction in their glorification of the justice of God.

The other main annihilationist argument in the literature is that the classic traditionalist hell is unjustly severe. Although I believe that a number of the annihilationist arguments are weak or confused, I am less confident of being able to offer steps to help resolve this issue as clearly as I believe I have offered steps towards the resolution of the problem of dualism. I have argued that although annihilationists believe hell to be an infinite punishment, it is actually best understood as a finite punishment with permanent consequences. Thus, if there is any justification to the argument for an infinite punishment, and I tend to think that there is, then Annihilationism should be rejected as unjustly lenient. However, it seems to me that Traditionalism may be unduly severe, and that some middle way should be sought. Therefore I have offered the notion of fixity as an alternative to be considered, and expounded it in such a way as it can be considered either as an infinite punishment that mitigates classic Traditionalism, or, less likely, as a finite punishment and thus even more of a mitigation. I am more confident that lucidity and reconciliation serve to change the severity of the punishment, and overall to mitigate it. In one sense I think that this makes the punishment more severe, since the damned can no longer evade the true nature of their sin, nor the true nature of their punishment, particularly the *poena damni*. Reconciliationism gets truth back into hell and serves to emphasise the personal nature of the punishment, making the punishment more truly moral and, insofar as it leads on to reconciliation, it may also establish a purpose for the punishment beyond simple retribution. I think that these features may well serve to reduce annihilationist objections, and, if I am right that Annihilationism is largely a reactive doctrine, to encourage annihilationists to reconsider a form of Traditionalism. Garratt states that his own form of Reconciliationism is basically

⁸⁸⁰ One example from many is *The Mystery of Salvation* by The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England (London: Church House Publishing, 1995), especially p. 199.

Traditionalism stripped of human additions. “The Eternal Punishment of unforgiven sinners is a Scriptural doctrine, and it is best to defend it from the plausible objections which human additions to the teaching of God’s Word have raised against it, by clearing them away.”⁸⁸¹ I believe that in arguing with Annihilationism I have come to just such a renewed understanding of the traditional doctrine.

Annihilationism as I have defined it in this essay is that doctrine of the fate of the damned which teaches that they remain eternally conscious in hell, but that they cease to sin and are in some sense reconciled to God without further experiencing the blessings of the saints in heaven. I have argued that it is best thought of as a modified form of Traditionalism, although the most common charge against it is that actually it collapses into a form of Universalism, and its advocates usually say it is a distinct fourth doctrine of hell, as I will now show.

1. A Personal Comment

Before giving a more formal historical survey I would like to offer a little personal comment about how I came to be made of these pieces in my study of the recent evangelical debate about hell. I read an essay by Henri Blocher which offered some ways of modifying the traditional position on hell in order to respond to the objections of the liberal, Unitarian, and annihilationist. I am deeply indebted to this point of view. However, Blocher didn’t mention any previous advocates of this position, although he noted elements of this position in older writers such as Augustine. He therefore seemed to be unaware of any historical debate about his position. That there was in fact a debate about a doctrine of hell, similar to that of Blocher’s, was opened up for me by various ways. First, in parallel conversation in 1993, Dr. Ronald H. Thompson suggested that he shared some similarities between the

⁸⁸¹ Garratt, *Veins*, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

Appendix: Reconciliationism - A Brief Historical Survey

In this appendix I intend to give a brief historical survey of the modified form of Traditionalism which I have termed Reconciliationism. First, after a brief personal comment about how I came to discover this position, I will begin with a survey of the chief advocates of this position in the period 1850-1910, which is when the doctrine came to prominence and accounts for almost all the relevant writers. Second, I will note theologians who were regarded as forerunners of this position. Third, I will note critical response. Finally, I will note references to Reconciliationism since 1910. There is also a fair amount of material in the main thesis, which I will try not to duplicate.

Reconciliationism as I have defined it in this thesis is that doctrine of the fate of the damned which teaches that they remain unendingly conscious in hell, but that they cease to sin and are in some sense reconciled to God without thereby experiencing the blessings of the saints in heaven. I have argued that it is best thought of as a modified form of Traditionalism, although the most common charge against it is that actually it collapses into a form of Universalism, and its advocates usually saw it as a distinct fourth doctrine of hell, as I will note below.

1 A Personal Comment

Before giving a more formal historical survey I would like to offer a brief personal comment about how I came to be aware of these writers. In my study of the recent evangelical debate about hell, I read an essay by Henri Blocher which offered some ways of modifying the traditional position so as to suggest to me ways of responding to the debate between traditionalists and annihilationists. I subsequently came to describe this position as Reconciliationism. However, Blocher didn't mention any previous advocates of this position, although he noted elements of the position in older writers such as Augustine. He therefore seemed to be unaware of any historical debate about his position. That there was an historic debate about a doctrine of hell, similar to that of Blocher's, was opened up for me in various ways. First, in personal conversation in 1992, Dr. Kendal Harmon mentioned that he noticed some similarities between the

position of Blocher and that of Langton Clarke. However, at the time I failed to make much of this comment, or to follow it up. Second, in his book on the doctrine of hell in the Victorian age, Geoffrey Rowell records and discusses the doctrine of hell held by T.R. Birks, one of the leading reconciliationist theologians. However, although Rowell records Birks' position, he neither gives Birks' position a name, nor sees Birks as part of a group of writers in that period advocating a distinct position. The only parallels to contemporary Victorian positions that Rowell notes are as follows:

There is a strong echo here of Maurice's concept of the Kingdom of Christ, and, as E.H. Plumptre recognised, there are many affinities between the theology of Maurice and Birks. Plumptre went so far as to comment that *The Victory of Divine Goodness* 'in not a few passages... presents so close a verbal identity with the language of Mr. Maurice's *Theological Essays*, that in a writer of inferior calibre it would suggest the thought of a literary plagiarism'.⁸⁸² He also pointed out the resemblance of Birks' teaching to that of some parts of E.H. Bickersteth's poem, *Yesterday, Today and for Ever*, published the year before *The Victory of Divine Goodness*.⁸⁸³⁸⁸⁴

However, I think that Birks held a distinctive position, and these claimed parallels are only partial. Third, Michael Paternoster offered some brief discussion of Birks, but again without noting any group of theologians holding a similar position. Fourth, the clearest and fullest bibliographical reference I have found comes at the end of H.

Griffith Thomas work *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*. He gives, as the fourth of four views on hell,

Another view which endeavours to harmonise the idea of everlasting punishment with the non-eternity of sin..." He gives as bibliography "*The Eternal Saviour-Judge*, by R.L. Clarke; *Reason and Revelation* (chap. xii), by Illingworth; *Sin, a Problem Today* (the last pages), by J. Orr; *World Without End*, and *Veins of Silver*, by Garratt; and *The Victory of Love*, by T.R. Birks.⁸⁸⁵

Although Thomas doesn't discuss these works, the value of the reference is not just that it is more comprehensive in terms of the number of theologians listed, but also because he lists it as a distinct doctrinal position alongside Traditionalism, Annihilationism and Universalism. Other references to this position and its advocates have been occasional and brief.

⁸⁸² E.H. Plumptre, *The Spirits in Prison*, 1884, p. 229.

⁸⁸³ e.g. p. 232, where Satan and the lost souls acknowledge the righteousness of their punishment.

⁸⁸⁴ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁸⁸⁵ W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Christian Theology* (5th ed., London: Church Book Room Press, 1956), p. 526. These bibliographical references were removed from subsequent editions. The correct initial for Langton Clarke is 'J' (for James) and not 'R' as Thomas records it. He may have confused him with Robert Lowes Clarke, another theologian of the time who had written on eschatological topics.

2 An Historical Survey

2.1 Written Works, 1850-1910

There are certain parallels between the context of the debate about hell amongst evangelicals at the end of the Twentieth Century, and that at the end of the Nineteenth Century. In both periods there was strong disagreement between traditionalists and annihilationists. Garratt wrote in 1904, looking back to 1872,

When I was writing this chapter there was rising a storm of controversy on the subject which divided men into various camps with none of which I found myself in agreement. Those varying opinions are still strongly held. I agreed with none of them then, and I agree with none of them now.⁸⁸⁶

Another statement, also with parallels today, and written in 1904, comes from the pen of Langton Clarke.

My own belief is that the clergy generally, even those who would formally give their adhesion to what is known as the orthodox doctrine [i.e. Traditionalism], avoid the subject as far as possible, because they feel so uncertain what the true nature of Eternal Judgement is, and are at least doubtful whether the ordinary presentation of the doctrine is the true one.⁸⁸⁷

The leading advocate of Reconciliationism was Thomas Rawson Birks. This is indicated in several ways. Not only was he held to be an able scholar (I have noted assessments in the main thesis), but he is the writer most often quoted and referred to by theological friend and critic alike. Samuel Garratt, a clergyman and Honorary Canon of Norwich, writes of the influence of Birks, while also indicating the lack of advocates of Reconciliationism. In the Preface to the 1904 edition of *Veins of Silver* Garratt states "I am painfully conscious of being in this matter unable to refer to any modern writers."⁸⁸⁸

On the next page though he qualifies this statement:

... even in our own day there has been one well-known Theologian, the late Professor Birks, to whom I alluded in the Preface to my First Edition, whose cordial agreement I then hoped for, and afterwards knew that I really possessed. There were no doubt others, but there was an astonishing reticence.⁸⁸⁹

In that 'Preface to the First Edition', Garratt notes the influence of Birks on his own views. "Some of the views here expressed I have long held. Of others the seed has been

⁸⁸⁶ Garratt, *Veins*, p. vii.

⁸⁸⁷ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁸⁸⁸ Garratt, *Veins*, p. vii.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

derived from Professor Birks.”⁸⁹⁰ He speaks of “the use I have made of his suggestive hints,”⁸⁹¹ and concludes,

nor do I wish myself to express agreement with every phrase or argument in *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, which, nevertheless, as a whole, is a book for which, especially in relation to the subject of Eternal Punishment, the Church has, in my opinion, much reason to be grateful to him and thankful to God.⁸⁹²

Garratt again notes the significance of Birks in his later book *World Without End*, in which he lists a series of recent writers on the subject of divine judgement, and notes last of all, “Birks (with the last of whom alone I am myself in substantial agreement);...”⁸⁹³ It is unclear from these comments just how great a debt Garratt owes to Birks for his views, and how much these views developed independently. It may also be that part of Birks’ influence was that he was also the first author to be published on this doctrine. However, this feature of the independent discovery of this doctrine which Garratt records is shared with others, including Birks himself.

Birks suggests that his view came by independent study without any major prior influences. He dates his discovery and acceptance of this fourth view to 1837. In his work, *Replies to Recent Strictures*, published in 1870 along with the second edition of *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, Birks offers the following chronological account of the development of his own thought.

The chief thoughts on Future Judgement, first published in this work, were unfolded to me about thirty-three years ago [1837], in the course of earnest and continual study of the Word of God. Expression in writing was first given to them, ten years ago, in my letter [1860],⁸⁹⁴ ... The state of the Church, viewed in the light of Prophecy, concurring with other reasons, made me feel it a duty, three years ago, to print them in their original form...⁸⁹⁵

In the Preface to *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, he makes similar chronological statements⁸⁹⁶ He also adds that “It is one [subject] on which my own thoughts were sorely, deeply, and continuously exercised more than 30 years ago.”⁸⁹⁷ A similarly independent route to a form of Reconciliationism seems to have been taken by a later advocate, Langton Clarke, who was Professor of Divinity at Durham University when

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, p. xiii. [Italics original]

⁸⁹³ Garratt, *World*, p. xi.

⁸⁹⁴ Birks, *Victory*.

⁸⁹⁵ Birks, *Victory*, pp. 254-255.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. v-vi.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. x.

he wrote his major work on the subject, *The Eternal Saviour Judge*.⁸⁹⁸ This significance of Birks is also highlighted not just by references in other proponents, but also by the fact that the only works of refutation I have found were all directed against Birks. These critics included Bevan, Baxter and, most prominently, Dr. Candlish. There are two other advocates of this position that Thomas mentions: James Orr, an influential conservative theologian who taught at the United Free Church College in Glasgow from 1900 to 1913; and Dr J.R. Illingworth who is perhaps best known for his two chapters in *Lux Mundi*.

Reconciliationism was understood by all its nineteenth century advocates more as an alternative to Traditionalism than a modification of it. Clarke uses the terminology of "A fourth view." The title of his third chapter is "A Fourth View Possible." Of this view Clarke writes, "nevertheless a *fourth* view seems possible, which has slowly grown up in my mind on the basis of the Eternal Saviour-Judgeship of Christ, and this view may be called by the name of *reconciliation*."⁸⁹⁹ Later Clarke notes that this terminology is used by Edersheim in his Appendix to his *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* on the question of everlasting punishment. Edersheim writes

It is at least conceivable that there may be a *quartum quid* (i.e. a fourth) [view of hell] - that there may be a purification or *transformation* (*sit venia verbis*) of all who are capable of such... and in connection with this, we note that there is quite a series of Scripture statements, which teach alike the final reign of God, and the final putting of all things under Christ, and all this in connection with the blessed fact that Christ has 'tasted death for every man,' that the world through Him might be saved, and that He was to 'draw all men unto Himself.'⁹⁰⁰

Clarke also so describes Illingworth's position, which he addresses in an Appendix.

DR. ILLINGWORTH ("Reason and Revelation," p.228ff.), although he says that, broadly speaking, Christian opinion is exhaustively represented by the three views... yet, in speaking of the doctrine of everlasting punishment, makes some remarks on its possible compatibility with reconciliation to God, which amount to a *fourth view*, and one which contains several important features of a doctrine of reconciliation.⁹⁰¹

⁸⁹⁸ Clarke, *op. cit.*.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85. [Italics original]

⁹⁰⁰ A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Appendix IX., vol. ii., p. 795, quoted by Clarke, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

⁹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 345. [Italics mine].

2.2 Forerunners of Reconciliationism, pre-1850

No advocate of Reconciliationism argues that it was ever common in any past period of the Church. Indeed none even mention a previous theologian as a clear advocate. The most that is claimed is that some aspect of a past theologians thought would support Reconciliationism. The rarity of this position in the history of doctrine is suggested, for example, by Garratt who emphasises the novelty of this view. Referring particularly to the notion that punishment does not harden the damned, he writes,

The consequences I have pointed out have never actually flowed from the traditional doctrine handed down to us in unsystematic utterances from an early period in the West, though not in the East where a healthier tone on this subject prevailed,...⁹⁰²

A similar point is made more forthrightly by one of Birks' critics, a Mr. Grant, who judged that Birks' book contained "views unlike any he had elsewhere met with,..."⁹⁰³ However Clarke seems to suggest that the doctrine of reconciliation may be closer to the view of the early church, when he quotes Gladstone who concludes that "none of the above three principal forms of eschatological opinion, which at the present day actively compete for the assent of believers in Christianity, altogether correspond with the sense of the early Christian church."⁹⁰⁴ Garratt can also be more positive about patristic support.

I am painfully conscious of being in this matter unable to refer to any modern writers [although in the same Preface he notes agreement with Birks]; but in the days of the best of the Christian Fathers, before Apostasy had ripened, and while Christian men still built their faith on Scripture, there were men like Gregory of Nazianzum and Gregory of Nyssa with whom on this point I am in accord;...⁹⁰⁵

In *World Without End*, he notes the same precedent for the purifying purpose of the judgement of hell in Gregory of Nyssa. "Denials there are also of any purifying purpose, in which they differ from Gregory of Nyssa, and are, as I think, at variance with Scripture."⁹⁰⁶ A little later, Garratt claimed Gregory of Nyssa argued for an end to rebellion.

Christ will not lay down His mediatorial kingdom till this work has been accomplished, and there remains not one rebel throughout the universe of God.

⁹⁰² Garratt, *World*, p. 252.

⁹⁰³ Mr. Grant, *Religious Tendencies of the Times*, vol. 2, p. 205.

⁹⁰⁴ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p.85, note 1, quoting Gladstone's *Studies on Butler*, p. 208. The three principle forms referred to are what I have termed Traditionalism, Annihilationism and Universalism.

⁹⁰⁵ Garratt, *Veins*, p. viii.

⁹⁰⁶ Garratt, *World*, p. 206.

This is no new interpretation of the text. It is dwelt upon by Gregory of Nyssa, ...⁹⁰⁷

Clarke's view of Gregory is rather different though when he writes of "the great Gregory of Nyssa, who taught Universalism in an extreme form, ..." ⁹⁰⁸ In a footnote, Garratt says that Augustine also held that there might be mercy shown in hell. "in [Enchiridion] cap. Cxii. St. Augustine seems to me to lean to a much truer view than that of the Schoolmen, and admits that it is possible that in everlasting punishment God may show mercy."⁹⁰⁹

Birks goes even further back and claims to find a foundation in Plato:

It is a deep thought of Plato in his *Dialogues*, that just as a sick man resorts to the physician, so wicked men, if they were wise, and knew what was really good, would offer themselves up, of their own accord, to undergo the punishment which is the only fit medicine for their inward disease. This truth will apply even to the last act of solemn judgement. Compared with the awful wages of sin, left without redemption, of death without resurrection, of corruption working ever without restraint, and evil triumphing for ever, and tormenting itself for ever, in its own abyss of darkness, even the second death with all its terrors may be, not only in the sight of a holy God, but even in the consciousness of the lost themselves, an infinite gain.⁹¹⁰

Blocher offers a fuller range of theological precursors for his slightly different position, which I have noted in the main thesis.

Before turning to writing which continued this position post-1910 I will also note the answers to two questions given by the writers in the period on which I am focusing. First, why it was that Traditionalism developed rather than Reconciliationism as the mainstream doctrine? Second, why is it that the doctrine of reconciliation had now come to the fore, or even been discovered for the first time? In answer to the first question Illingworth observed:

Holding that everlasting punishment was implied in the New Testament, men have gone on to infer that this would involve everlasting impenitence - the perpetuity of sinful will, with all the speculative difficulty that such a notion creates.⁹¹¹

Birks argues from a doctrine of reserve, by which I mean the idea that any doctrine of hell which mitigates the severity of the classic traditionalist one is liable to weaken the incentives to moral behaviour in society, and so should only be revealed as necessary.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁹⁰⁸ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

⁹⁰⁹ Garratt, *World*, p. 205, n. 1.

⁹¹⁰ Birks, *Victory*, pp. 170-171.

However, he doesn't use it to argue that Reconciliationism has long been held but not revealed, but simply that it shouldn't be widely disseminated in his own day.⁹¹² In answer to the second question as to why only now Reconciliationism has come to the fore, Birks argues against the background of a prophetic schema which understands that new doctrinal truth from the Scriptures will be revealed as the end of the world approaches.⁹¹³

2.3 Reconciliationism Since 1910

I have found no works clearly advocating a position which could be termed Reconciliationism since 1910, with the one exception of Henri Blocher, who doesn't refer to the Nineteenth Century proponents at all, and thus may be unaware of these earlier advocates. I have noted other traditionalist writers in the main thesis, such as Helm, who have suggested elements of the position but do not distinguish themselves from classic Traditionalism. Thus my conclusion remains that this is an unusual position in the history of doctrine. The only three references to this position I have found in writing post-1910 are those I have already mentioned: Griffith Thomas, who is the only writer in this period to present it as a clear and distinct alternative to the existing eschatological positions; Michael Paternoster; Geoffrey Rowell; Don Carson; Jan Bonda; and Earle Ellis.

2.4 Critical Engagement, 1850-1910

There are three main written critical responses on Birks. (There are no commentaries I have found on any other advocates, which again serves to highlight the importance of Birks.) Birks notes each of these traditionalist critics. "The first mover in this attack [Mr. Grant]... The second exposition of orthodoxy by my chief assailant (God's Purpose in Judgement) [Mr Baxter]... [and] Dr. Candlish..."⁹¹⁴ In his *Reply to Recent Strictures*, Birks responds to the first two of these works, and gives more details about them.

I now pass on to review the objections which, during the present year, have been brought against [Birks' views] These are found in the second volume of Mr. Grant's "Religious Tendencies of the Times," and a smaller work of Mr. Baxter,

⁹¹¹ Illingworth, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

⁹¹² See Birks, *Victory*, pp. 45-47; pp. 173-174; Garratt, *World*, pp. 227-229.

⁹¹³ See Birks, *Victory*, pp. 174-175.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-65.

called, "God's Purpose in Judgement." Both of these may have gained a wider influence, at least among Evangelical Churchman, from the highly flattering notices they have received from their reviewer in the Record, who has made himself a public partner in all the severest charges against myself and the statements of the previous work... The second volume of Mr. Grant's "Religious Tendencies of the Times" contains fifty pages in which I am concerned,...⁹¹⁵ Rowell briefly fills in a little of the historical background, and comments that "The attack [to have Birks expelled from the Evangelical Alliance] was led by a solicitor, R. Baxter,..."⁹¹⁶ Rowell also mentions *The Religious Tendencies of our Time* by James Grant who was editor of the Morning Advertiser, following his receipt of an account of Birks' views from R.C.L. Bevan, Treasurer to the Evangelical Alliance.⁹¹⁷ However the most able critic is Dr. Candlish who delivered his comments in his introductory lecture at the opening of the Session of the Free Church of Scotland, at New College, Edinburgh, in 1869, subsequently published as a pamphlet the following year. Birks responded to Dr. Candlish in a lengthy pamphlet of his own, published the same year, entitled, *The Atonement and the Judgement: A Reply to Dr. Candlish's Inaugural Lecture; with a Brief Statement of Facts in Connection with the Evangelical Alliance.*

3 Conclusion

I conclude by drawing together some observations. First, the only advocates of Reconciliationism come in the period 1850-1910, with the sole exception of Blocher. However Blocher does not note any of these earlier theologians in his writings on hell. Second, although these theologians show some knowledge of each other, there never developed a clear group advocating this position. A sign of this is that I have found only one reference since 1910 to Reconciliationism as a distinct doctrinal alternative to Traditionalism, Annihilationism and Universalism, in Griffith Thomas' bibliography. Third, there are a significant number of variations between writers, which I have noted in the main thesis, and thus no standard presentation of the doctrine. This may in part be due to the fact that chief advocates state or imply that they came by their views through largely independent study, while noting some debts to other writers, particularly Birks, who is the earliest and most influential advocate.

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁹¹⁶ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8.

These conclusions suggest some further thoughts. First, despite the advocacy of several notable theologians, the doctrine of reconciliation did not gain any widespread acceptance. Garratt concludes his Preface to his First Edition of *Veins of Sliver*, written in 1872, and retained in the third edition of 1904, with these optimistic words “[W]hile I do not expect that all will at once receive as truth what is here taught, I have the full conviction that not many years will elapse before Christian men will wonder that it could ever have been doubted.”⁹¹⁸ However, Garratt’s expectation did not prove to be correct. It might therefore be argued that the theory was tested, and found wanting. However, it may be that there never developed much momentum to hone and develop the position, and thus it may be that there is still a useful job of advocacy to be done based on a careful exposition and clarification of the position, with its several variants. Such a clarified and, hopefully, strengthened presentation, may generate more interest amongst theologians, and Garratt’s conviction may yet have a partial fulfilment. Second, the recent debate about hell has almost entirely overlooked this position as an alternative. It may therefore be of value to continue Blocher’s work and to place it in the context of the terminology and issues of the recent debate.

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⁹¹⁸ Garratt, *Veins*, pp. xiv-xv.

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